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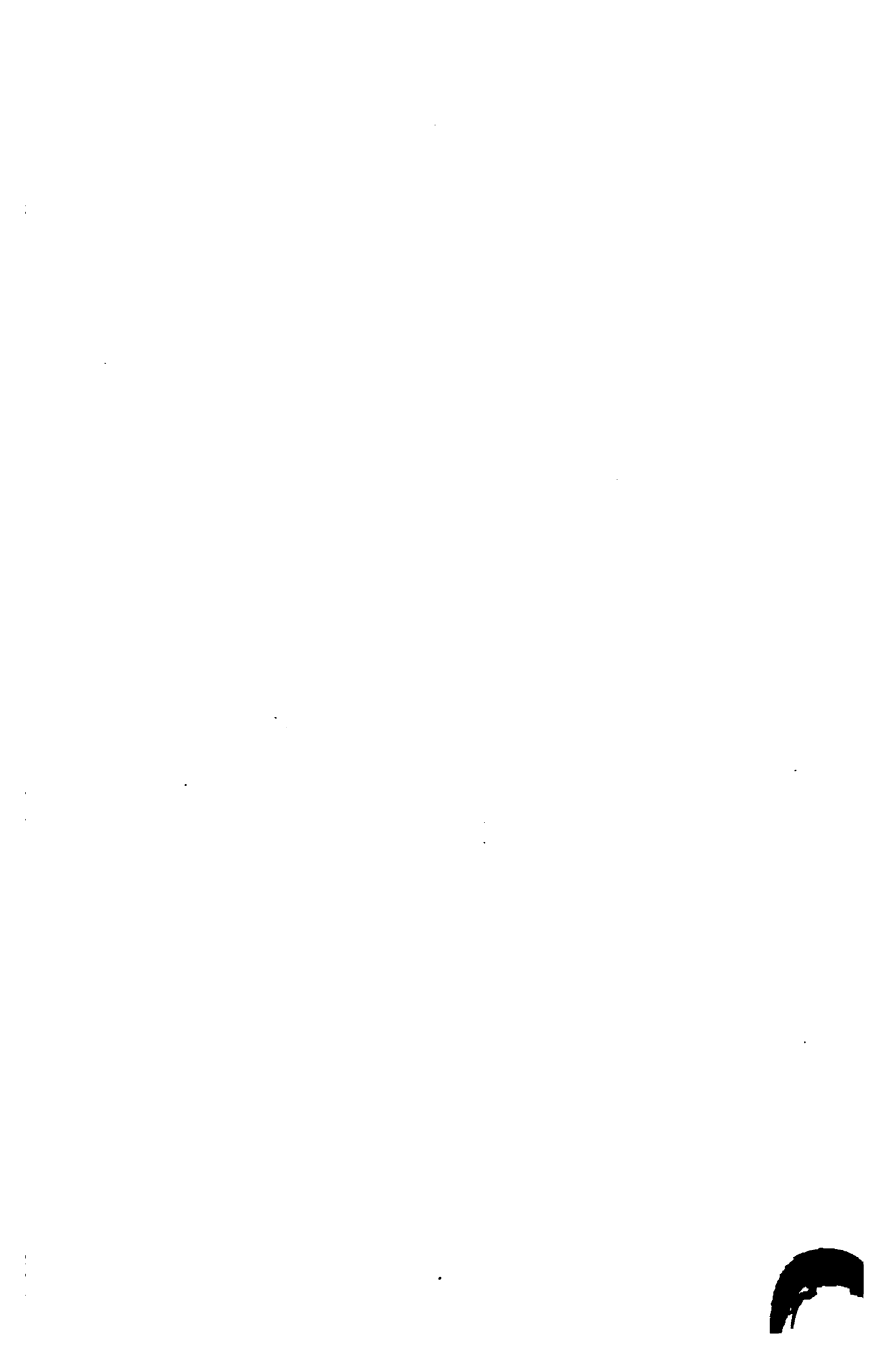
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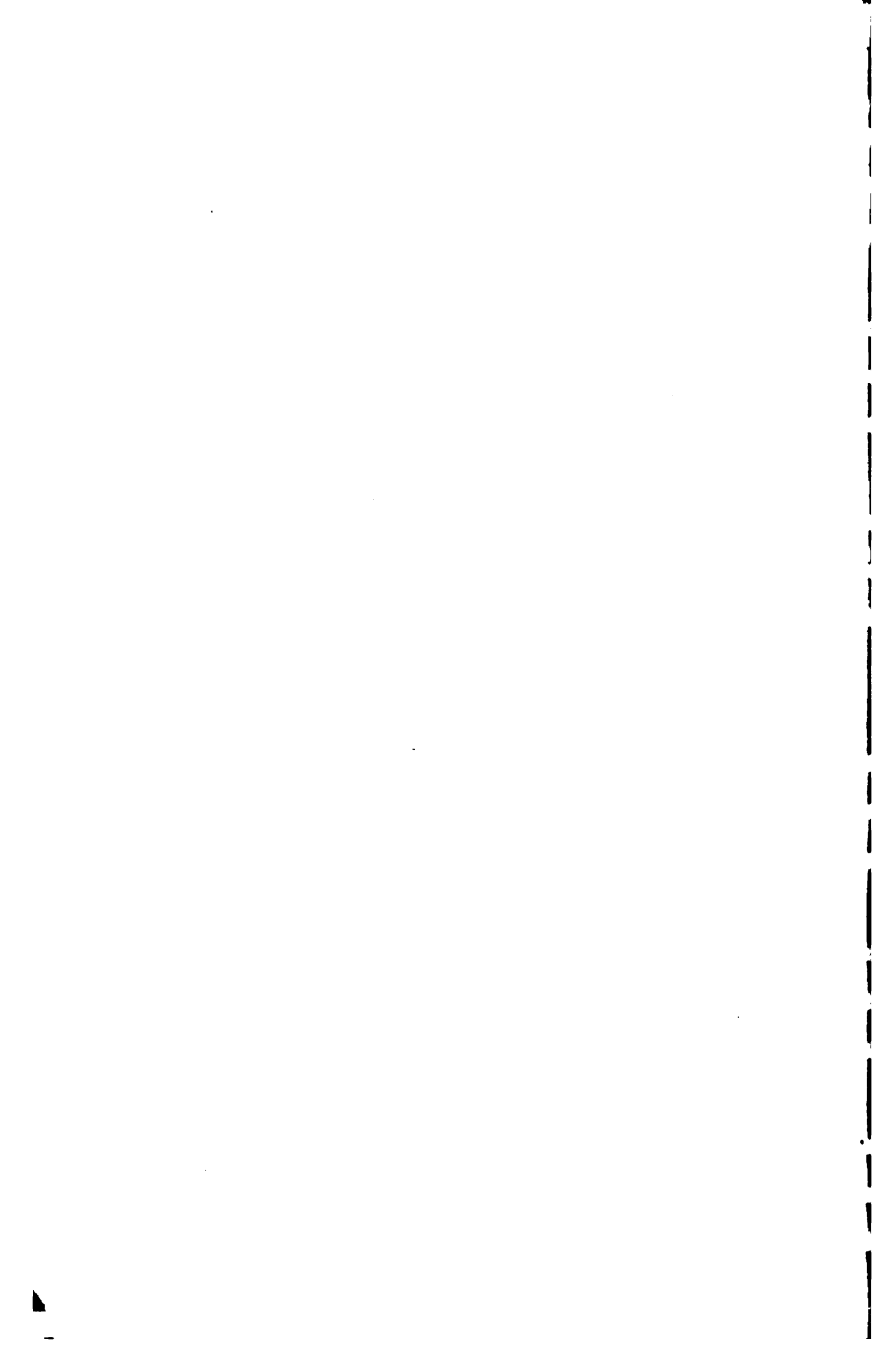
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BIRDS OF HEAVEN

and Other Stories

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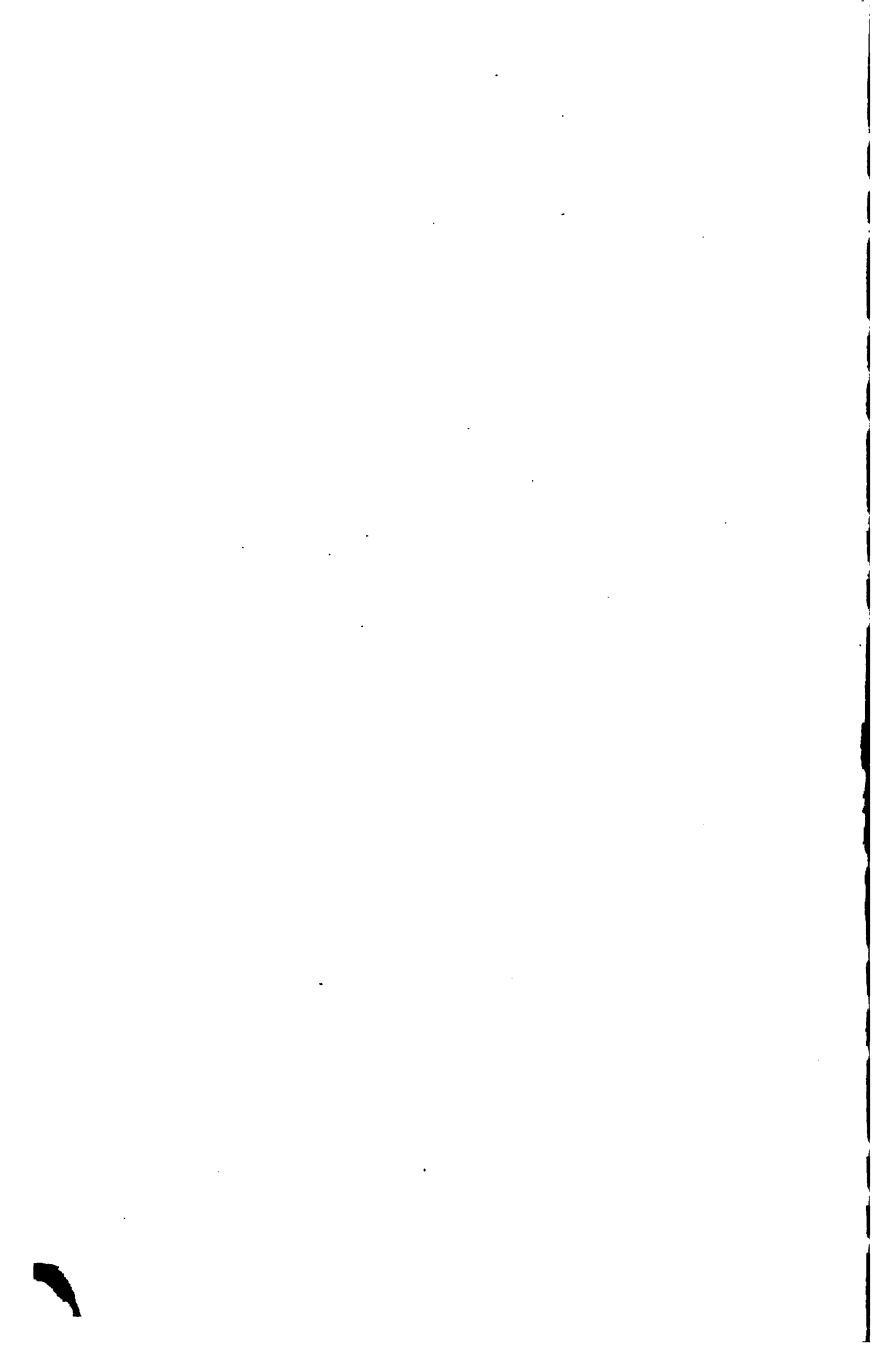
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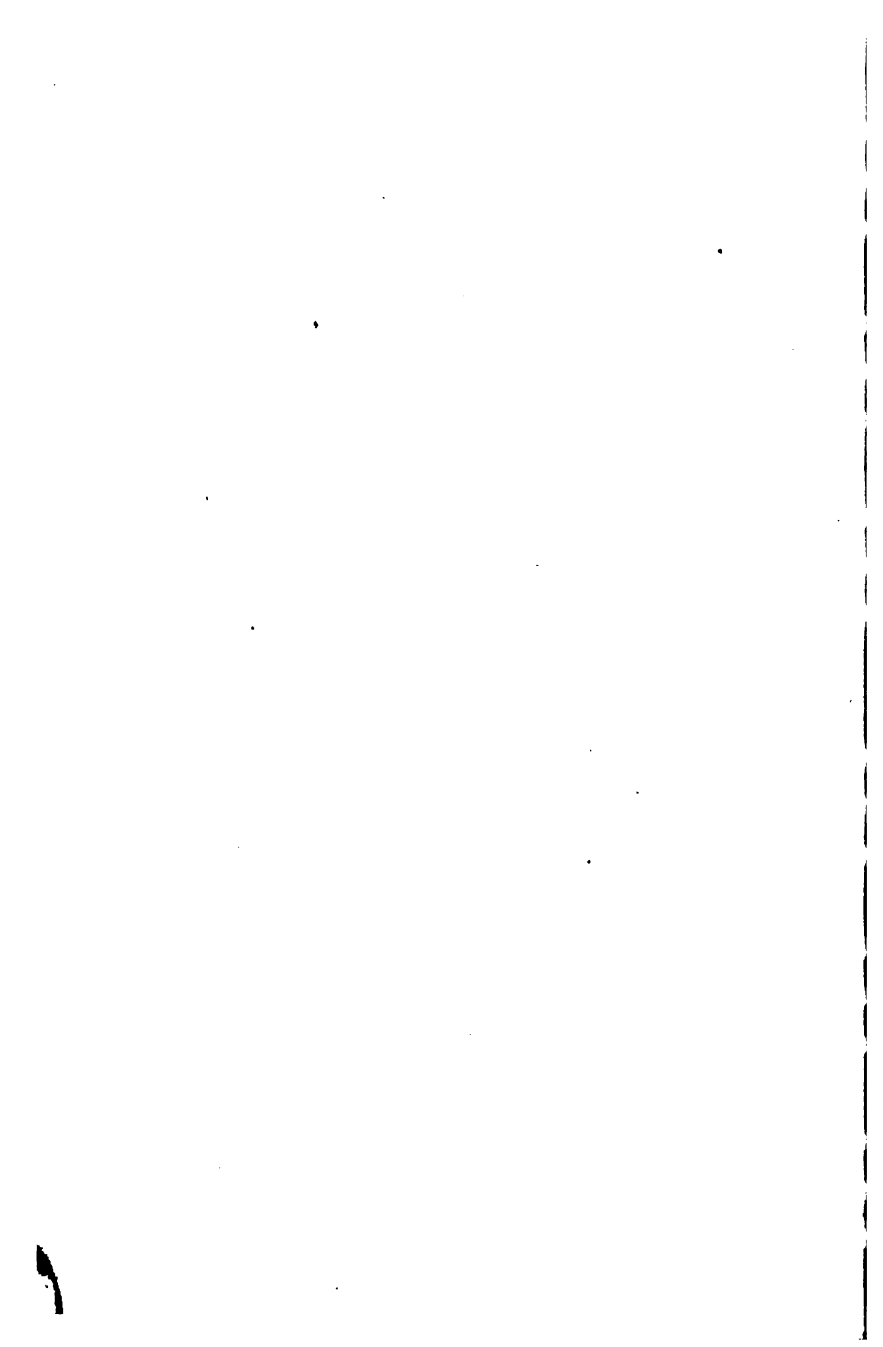
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INTRODUCTION

Of all of the more modern authors of Russia, perhaps none holds a higher rank than Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko. He was born in 1853 in Zhitomir, in the southern part of the Government of Volhynia.

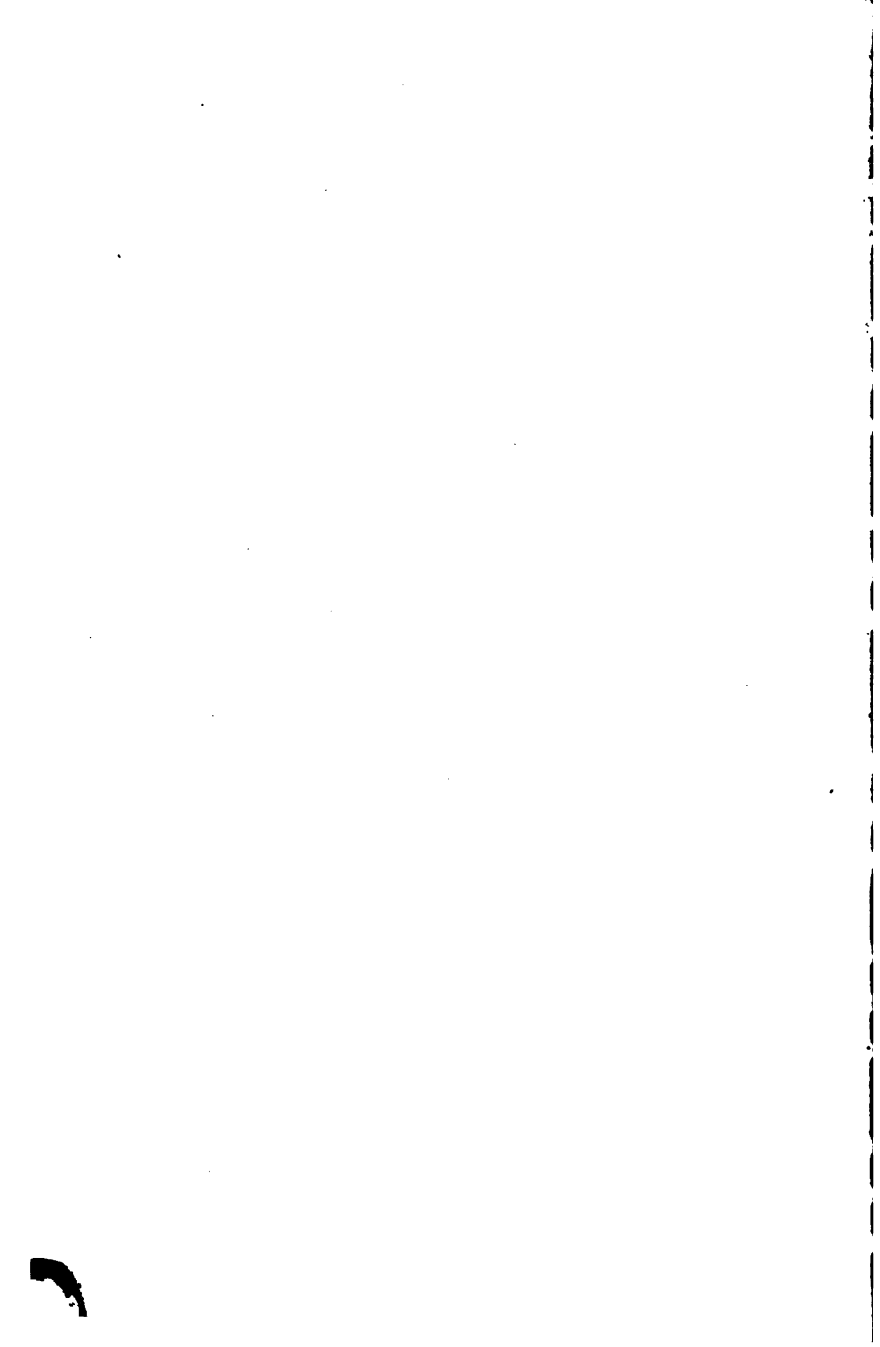
His works show an extensive knowledge of Russia, through which he travelled very extensively (partly due to the fact that he was one time banished for political reasons), and a very keen appreciation of the beauties and moods of nature. Even more than this, however, he appreciates very keenly the hardships and pleasures of the life of the people and while depicting them realistically, he succeeds in casting over even sordid and unpleasant scenes, a veil of poetic beauty and of spiritual significance, which elevate his work above much of that produced by his contemporaries.

The stories in this volume date from the last part of the nineteenth century, for the most part, and give a very good idea of the range and variety

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of the themes handled by Korolenko and of the almost mystical treatment which he sometimes employs and his works in this respect are, if anything, more typically Russian than are those of his contemporaries who strive for a brutal and often repulsive realism.

BIRDS OF HEAVEN



BIRDS OF HEAVEN

I

THAT day the monastery was joyously greeting the ikon. For two months the "Lady" had been traveling from place to place and now she was returning home.

First in their three-horse coaches came the priests who had accompanied her and who were now bringing back to the monastery the treasure which they had collected on their travels. They looked healthy, well-fed, and satisfied. They were followed by the motley bands of pilgrims. These came in greater and greater numbers out of the forest, until at last the climax was reached with the gilded covering of the ikon flashing in the sunlight above the heads of the marchers.

Bells pealed forth; banners gleamed and waved; the singing of the choir and the tramping of thousands of men, like an onrushing river, filled the

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quiet neighborhood of the monastery with uproar and confusion.

The place awoke. In the church hymns of thanksgiving were sung. On the square merchants and market women called out their wares from under their linen curtains; from the "institution" came the sounds of harmonicas and cymbals; in the huts of the village one set of pilgrims kept replacing another at the tables on which steamed enormous samovars.

Towards evening a hard rain suddenly came up and drove the crowds and the merchants from the bazaar. The square and the streets became quiet and no sound was to be heard save the splashing of the huge drops in the puddles and the flapping and blowing of the wet curtains, as they were tossed by the storm wind. Yes, and in the church the harmonious singing still continued and the yellow lights of the candles still flickered on.

When the clouds suddenly lifted and streamed off to the east, carrying with them the veil of mist which had hung over the fields and woods, the sun reappeared in the west and with its parting rays it tenderly caressed the windows of the village and the crosses of the monastery. But the earlier bustle did not return to the square of the bazaar. The pilgrims all had a quiet thirst for rest after their

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hard journey and the day ended with the last notes of the concluding service in the church. Even the cymbals behind the wall of the "institution" clashed weakly and dully.

The service was ended. Within the church the candles burned out one after the other. The pilgrims scattered. Little groups of men and women stood at the door of the guest-house of the monastery, until the guest-master should grant admission to those who desired lodging. A fat monk and two lay brothers came out on the porch and began to divide the sheep from the goats. The sheep entered the door; the goats were driven off and, muttering, made their way to the gates. At the end of this operation, there remained by the entrance a group of Mordvin women and a wanderer. Apparently, their fate had already been decided by the guest-master who reentered the building.

In a moment the lay brothers came out, counted the women and admitted them to the women's apartments. The older lay brother walked up to the solitary stranger and said with a bow:

"Forgive me, for Christ's sake, Brother Varsonofy. . . . The guest-master will not permit you to stay here. . . . Go in peace."

A sick smile passed over the face of the young

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wanderer and I was surprised by its peculiar, dramatic, and significant character. The man's face was also worthy of notice: hump-nosed, thin, and with large, glowing eyes. A pointed hat and a hardly noticeable, but pointed, beard gave the man an unusual appearance. The whole dry figure dressed in an old cassock, with a thin neck and a strong profile, attracted your attention, even against your will. The impression which it produced was clear, alarming and disturbing.

When he heard the words of the lay brother, the stranger bowed and said:

"God will save and for this . . ."

As he turned to go, he suddenly staggered. He was clearly sick and extremely tired. The good-hearted lay brother looked at him and hesitated.

"Wait, Brother Varsonofy. . . . I will try again."

The stranger rested on his staff and waited expectantly. But in a moment the brother again came out and, walking up with some embarrassment, said with evident pity:

"No, he won't allow it. . . . Father Nifont told him that a stranger . . . like you . . . speaks badly . . . disturbs the people."

The stranger's face showed how he felt. His

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eyes flashed, as if he were about to speak, but he bowed and said:

“Thank you, fathers. . . .”

And he wearily went from the door.

The lay brother looked at me questioninglly. I knew that he was about to shut the gate and so I went to the outer court. This was already empty. The young man who sold kalaches (cakes) for the monastery was behind his stand, but no one came to it.

The porter closed one gate behind me and then, pressing with his feet, he started to close the second. Just then a scuffle was heard within the gate, the tramping of several pairs of feet; the opening again widened and in it appeared an ill-favored figure in a pilgrim's costume, reddish and faded. A rough, hairy hand held it by the collar and directed its involuntary movements. A vigorous push. . . . The stranger flew off several paces and fell. One wallet and then another sailed after him. . . . A small book in a worn leather binding fell out in the mud and its leaves commenced to blow in the wind.

“Look here, . . .” said a deep, bass voice behind the gate. “Don't quarrel. . . .”

“What's the matter?” asked the porter.

“Why, this,” answered the bass voice. “Be-

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cause of him the guest-master sinned . . . turned a man away. . . . And he's a good man. Oh! Oh! . . . a real sin. . . ."

The speaker went away. The porter shut the gate, but not quite completely; curiosity mastered him and his little eyes, his fat nose, and his light mustache could be seen through the crack. He was following with manifest interest the further actions of the rejected wanderer.

The latter quickly rose, gathered up his wallets, put one on his back, and threw the other over his shoulder. Then, picking up the book, he carefully began to clean the mud off of it. Looking around the court, he caught sight of me and of the kalach-seller. A group of peasants were watching the little drama from the outer gates of the square. Deliberately the stranger assumed an air of dignity, and, with the most demonstrative devotion, he kissed the binding of the book and made a sarcastic bow toward the inner gates.

"I thank you, holy fathers. As ye have received the stranger and fed the hungry . . ."

Suddenly noticing in the crack of the gate the mustache and nose of the porter, he said in a different tone:

"What are you looking at? Did you recognize me?"

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"I thought . . . yes . . . I thought you were familiar," said the porter.

"Of course, of course! . . . We're old friends! We ran off together to the Mordvin women of Sviridov. . . . Do you remember now?"

The porter spat loudly and angrily, closed the gate, and threw the bolt. But his feet, with their rough boots, could still be seen beneath the gate.

"Don't you remember Fenka, father?"

The feet disappeared as if ashamed.

The stranger straightened his muddy cloak and again looked around. Attracted by the unusual conversation, some six peasants had strolled towards the gate. They were the nearest neighbors to the monastery, Old Believers from the villages in the vicinity, who had come to the bazaar with an air of indifferent and even hostile curiosity. Despite its influence at a distance, the monastery was surrounded by a ring of the "most venomous" sectarians, as the monks expressed it. The inhabitants of the region were positive that in the near future the monastery would be threatened with the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. But still it continued and attracted thousands of people to its festivals. On such days the figures of the Old Believers furnished a grim contrast to the rejoicing multitudes and their faces reflected their

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hostility and disgust. Like the Prophet Jonah, they murmured because the Lord delayed in inflicting the promised doom upon the accursed Nineveh.

They were now watching with malevolent curiosity the scene which was being enacted at the door of the dishonorable habitation.

"What's the matter? They won't let him in, I see, . . ." one said jokingly. "It's crowded . . . with Mordvin women. . . ."

The wanderer turned and threw a keen glance at the speaker. Suddenly his face took on a humble expression and he walked back to the gate,—and three times he crossed himself reverently and ostentatiously.

The peasants looked at one another in surprise; the stranger had made the sign of the cross not with three fingers, but in the old way with only two.

"The Lord, Who seest all things, will reward the monks according to their mercy," he said with a sigh. "We, brothers, will shake off the dust from our feet, and listen here, in the temple not made with hands (he pointed gracefully and calmly to the evening sky), to an instructive sermon on repentance. . . ."

The peasants crowded together; their faces ex-

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pressed their delighted and also credulous surprise. The change was too unexpected. . . . The idea of holding their own meeting on the alien festival and of listening at the very gate of the monastery to a wandering preacher, who made the sign of the cross in the old way, clearly pleased the adherents of the old faith. The preacher took his stand at the base of the bell-tower. The wind ruffled his dusty, light hair.

. It was hard to tell the man's precise age, but he was clearly not old. His face was heavily tanned and his hair and eyes seemed faded from the action of sun and storm.

At each movement of his head, however slight, the cords of his neck stood out prominently and trembled. The man gave you, involuntarily, the impression of something unfortunate, wonderfully self-controlled and, perchance, evil.

He began to read aloud. He read well, simply, and convincingly, and, stopping now and then, he commented in his own way on what he had read. Once he glanced at me, but he quickly shifted his eyes. I thought he did not care for my presence. After that he turned more often to one of his auditors.

This was a broad-shouldered, undersized peasant, whose shape might have been fashioned by two

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or three blows of an axe. In spite of the squareness of his figure, he seemed very communicative. He paid the utmost attention to every word of the preacher and added some remarks of his own, which expressed his almost childish joy.

"Oh, brothers . . . my friends," he said, looking around. . . . "It's so true, what he told us about repentance. . . . The end might come. . . . You know . . . and we're such sinners . . . just one little sin more and another. Yes, yes . . ."

"And that means another and another, . . ." broke in a second.

"Yes. . . . You see. . . . Oh! . . ."

With delighted eyes, he looked around the gathering. . . .

His noisy interruption and his joy apparently did not please the preacher. The latter suddenly stopped, turned his head quickly, and the cords of his neck tightened like ropes. . . . He wanted to say something, but he checked himself and turned a page.

The congregation had rejoiced too early. At the very time when they were most highly exalted,—pride and excessive hope pressed hard on the ladder. It trembled; the listeners seemed frightened; the ladder crashed down. . . .

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"He's through!" were the sad words of the deep-voiced peasant.

"Yes, brother!" chimed in the first. And a strange thing: he turned his sparkling eyes on all and the same joy sounded in his voice. . . . "Now we have no excuse. . . . We mustn't do that first little sin."

The stranger closed his book and for a few seconds he watched the speaker obstinately. But the peasant met his gaze with the same joy and trusting good nature.

"Do you think so?" asked the preacher.

"Yes," answered the man. "Judge yourself, my friend. . . . How long will He suffer us?"

"Do you think so?" the preacher asked again with some emphasis, and his voice caused signs of uneasiness to appear on the other's face.

"You know there are limits to the long suffering of God. You know about the Orthodox Catholic Church."

He turned a few pages and began to read about the spiritual power of the Orthodox Church. The faces of his hearers darkened. The preacher stopped and said:

"The Orthodox Catholic Church. . . . Is she not the means of salvation? He who seeks refuge in her need not despair. So . . . if . . ."

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A tense silence prevailed for a few seconds. The stranger was facing the crowd of peasants and he felt that he held their feelings in his hands. Not long since, they had been following him joyfully and it was not hard to foresee the results of the sermon: the men of the old faith had been ready to invite to their homes the man who had been driven from the monastery. Now they were dumbfounded and did not know what to think.

"But if," continued the stranger, accenting each word, "any one rejects the one Mother Church . . . expects to be saved in cellars with the rats . . . if he trusts in shaved heads . . ."

The peasant with the deep voice suddenly turned and walked away.

His good-natured companion glanced around with an air of disillusionment and a lack of comprehension and said half-questioningly:

"Are you shocked? . . . Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! . . ."

He followed the others. The sectarians grimly went to the gates. The wanderer remained alone. His figure was outlined sharply against the base of the tower and there was a strange expression in his faded blue eyes. Evidently he had intended to gain by his sermon that lodging which the monks had denied him. Why had he suddenly changed his tone? . . .

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There were now only three of us in the yard: the wanderer, I and the young fellow under the curtain of the booth. The stranger glanced at me but at once turned away and walked up to the dealer. The young man's face beamed with joy. . . .

"That was clever," he said. "You shocked them well. They all had their heads shaved. The devils were threshing peas. Ha, ha, ha!"

He broke out into a hearty, youthful laugh and started to put his wares within the shop.

When he had finished, he closed the swinging doors and locked them. The shop was well made and adapted for moving,—it was on wheels and had a low shelf. The fellow evidently intended to sleep by his wares.

"Well, it's time to go to bed," he said, looking at the sky.

In the yard and behind the gates all was still and deserted. From the bazaar the wares had all been carried away. The fellow faced the church, crossed himself, opened the door a little way and crawled under his stand.

His hands soon appeared. He was trying to put a small screen over the opening.

The stranger also looked up at the sky, thought a few seconds, and walked resolutely up to the shop.

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"Wait, Mikhailo! I'll help you like a good fellow."

The pale-faced man let go and looked out of his quarters

"My name's Anton," he said simply.

"Come, Antosha, let me help you."

"I'm very glad; thank you. It's hard to do it from here."

Anton's simple face disappeared.

"Please . . . move your feet a little."

Anton obeyed. The wanderer quietly opened the door, stooped quickly, and, to my amazement, I saw him step nimbly into the opening. A scuffle ensued. Anton moved his feet and part of the stranger appeared outside for a moment, but without any delay and almost instantaneously he disappeared again within.

Interested by this unexpected turn of events, I almost instinctively walked up to the booth.

"I'll yell, I'll yell," I heard the nasal but pitiful voice of Anton. "The fathers will beat you up again!"

"Don't yell, Misha. What's the matter?" argued the wanderer.

"Why do you keep calling me Misha? I tell you my name's Anton."

"In the monastic jargon your name will be

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Mikhailo. Remember that. . . . Hush! Quiet, Anton, keep still."

The booth became silent.

"What for?" asked Anton. "What do you hear?"

"Listen, hear the tapping. . . . It's raining."

"Well, what of it? Tapping. . . . If I let out one shout, the fathers will tap harder on you."

"Why do you keep harping on one thing? I'll yell and yell. You'd better not. If you do, I'll eat you up. I'll tell you a good story about a nun. . . ."

"I see, you've been stealing something."

"It's wrong, Antosha, for you to slander a stranger. You gave me this one kalach yourself. I ate nothing—you believe God. . . ."

"Go ahead and eat a stale one. . . . I haven't eaten them up," and Anton yawned so hard that he gave up all thoughts of further resistance.

"You shocked those blockheads well," he added at the end of his strenuous yawn. "You've certainly showed them up."

"And the fathers?"

"The fathers wanted to spit at you. . . . You promised to tell me a story. Why don't you do it?"

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"In a certain country, in a certain land," began the stranger, "in a convent with a stone wall, lived a nun, brother Antoshenka. . . . And such a nun. . . . Oh, oh, oh!"

"Yes? . . ."

"Yes, she lived there, and grieved."

Silence.

"Well? . . . Go on."

Silence again.

"Well, go on. What did she grieve about?" insisted the interested Anton.

"Go to the devil, that's what! Why did I start a story? You know I hoofed it thirty versts to-day. She grieved about you, you fool, that's what she did. Let me sleep!"

Anton let out a sound of utter exhaustion.

"Well, you're a rogue. I see your scheme," he said reproachfully.

"All right, knave," a minute later but more softly, and even sorrowfully. "Yes, a knave. . . . I never saw such a knave before."

All was quiet in the booth. The rain beat harder and harder on the slanting roof, the earth grew black, the puddles disappeared in the darkness. The monastery garden whispered something, and the buildings behind the wall stood defenceless against the rain, which pattered on the gutters.

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The guard within the enclosure beat upon his wet rattle.

II

The next day I started back with Andrey Ivanovich, who had accompanied me on many of my wanderings. We had been walking not without having interesting experiences, lodged in the village, and started off again rather late. The pilgrims had already left and it was hard to imagine the crowds which had passed by such a little while before. The villages seemed busy; the workmen could be seen as white spots on the fields. The air was muggy and hot.

My companion, a tall, thin, nervous man, was this day especially gloomy and irritable. This was a not at all uncommon state towards the end of our joint trips. But this day he was unusually out of humor and expressed his personal disapproval of me.

Towards afternoon, in the heat, we became completely disgusted with each other. Andrey Ivanovich either thought it necessary to rest without any reason in the most inappropriate places, or wished to push on, when I proposed stopping.

We finally reached a little bridge. A small

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stream was flowing quietly between the damp green banks with their nodding heads of grass. The stream wound along and disappeared behind a bend amid the waving grain of the meadows.

"Let's rest," I said.

"We've got to be getting on," answered Andrey Ivanovich.

I sat down on the railing and began to smoke. The tall figure of Andrey Ivanovich went on, ascended a hill and disappeared.

I bent over the water and began to meditate. I thought I was absolutely alone, but I suddenly felt that some one was looking at me and then on a hill under some birch trees, I saw two men. One had a small and almost childish face. He at once hid from shame in the grass behind the crest of the hill. The other was the preacher of the preceding evening. As he lay on the grass, he quietly turned his bold, gray eyes upon me.

"Come, join us, we'll have more fun together," he said simply.

I got up and to my surprise I saw the feet of Andrey Ivanovich sticking out of the grass by the road; he was sitting nearby in the boundary strip, and his cigar smoke was rising above the tops of the grass. I pretended not to see him and walked up to the strangers.

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The one whom I had taken for a child proved to be a young, sickly creature in a striped cassock, with thin hair around his narrow, sallow face and a nose like a bird's beak. He kept straightening his cassock, was uneasy, kept moving around and was clearly ashamed of his condition.

"Sit down and be our guest," the preacher suggested with a slight gesture. Just then the tall figure of Andrey Ivanovich rose like the shade of Banquo above the grain.

"Let's be going!" he said in a not very kind tone of voice, as he threw away the butt of his cigar.

"I'll stay here," I answered.

"I see you like those parasites better. . . ." And Andrey Ivanovich glanced at me sorrowfully, as if he wished to impress upon me the impropriety of my choice.

"Yes, there's more fun here," I answered.

"I'm through with you. I hope you remain in good company."

He pulled his cap down over his face and started off with long strides, but he soon stopped, came back, and said angrily:

"Don't ask me again! You rascal, I'll never go with you again. Don't you dare to ask me! I refuse."

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"It's my business whether I ask you or not. . . . Yours is to go or not."

"A serious-minded gentleman!" The wanderer nodded after him as he started off.

"He doesn't approve of us," the little man said in a voice that was between a sigh and a squeak.

"What do we care whether he does or not?" remarked the preacher indifferently. Then he turned to me:

"Haven't you a cigarette, sir? . . . Please."

I held out my case to him. He took out two cigarettes, lighted one and placed the other beside him. His small companion interpreted this in a favorable way and rather irresolutely reached for the free cigarette. But the preacher, with perfect composure, took the cigarette out of his hands and placed it on the other side. The little fellow was embarrassed, again squeaked from shame and straightened his robes.

I gave him a cigarette. This embarrassed him still more,—his thin, transparent fingers trembled; he smiled sadly and bashfully.

"I don't know how to beg," he said in shame. "Avtonomov orders and orders. . . . But I can't."

"Who's this Avtonomov?" I asked.

"That's me,—Gennady Avtonomov," said the preacher with a stern glance at his small com-

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panion, who quailed under the glance and dropped his sallow face. His thin hair fell and rose.

"Are you walking for your health, or why?" Avtonomov asked me.

"Because I want to. . . . Where are you going?"

He looked into the distance and answered:

"To Paris or nearer, to Italy or further. . . ." And, noticing that I did not understand, he added:

"I was joking. . . . I am wandering aimlessly wherever it suits me. For eleven years——"

He spoke with a faint touch of sadness. Then he quietly exhaled some tobacco smoke and watched the blue clouds melt away in the air. His face had a new expression, a quality I had never noticed before.

"A wasted life, signor! A ruined existence, which deserved a better lot."

The sadness disappeared and he concluded grandiloquently, with a flourish of his cigarette:

"Yet, good sir, the wanderer will never be willing to exchange his liberty for luxurious palaces."

Just then a bold little bird flew over our heads like a clod of earth thrown up into the air, perched on the lowest branch of the birch, and began to twitter without paying any attention to our presence. The face of the little wanderer brightened

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and was suffused with a ludicrous kindness. He kept time with his thin lips and, at the successful completion of any tune, he looked at us with triumphant, smiling, and weeping eyes.

"O God!" he said finally, when the bird flew away at the end of its song. "A creature of God. It sang as much as it needed to, it praised Him, and flew off on its own business. O darling! . . . Yes, by heaven, that's right."

He looked at us joyfully, and then became embarrassed, stopped talking, and straightened his cassock, but Avtonomov waved his hand and added like a teacher:

"Behold the birds of heaven. We, signor, are the same kind of birds. We sow not, neither do we reap, nor gather into barns. . . ."

"You studied in the seminary?" I asked.

"Yes. I could tell a lot about that; only there's little worth hearing. But, as you see, the horizon is being covered with clouds. Up, Ivan Ivanovich; rise, comrade, rise. The portion of the wanderer is journeying, not resting. Let us wish you every sort of blessing."

He nodded and started rapidly along the road. He took free, even strides, leaning on a long staff and thrusting it back with every step. The wind blew out the skirts of his cassock, he bent forward

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under his wallet, and his wedge-shaped beard projected in front. It seemed as if this sun-burned, dried, and faded figure had been created for the poor Russian plain with the dark villages in the distance and the clouds which thoughtfully gathered in the sky.

"A scholar!" Ivan Ivanovich shook his head sadly as he tied up his wallet with trembling hands. "A most learned man! But he falls to nothing just as I. On the same plane . . . we wander together. God forgive us, the last. . . ."

"Why?"

"Why? How? The modern wanderer has a good wallet, a cassock or kaftan, boots, for example,—in a word, equipment for every circumstance, so to speak. And we! You see yourself. I'm coming, I'm coming, Gennady Sergeich, I'm coming. Right away!"

The little fellow soon overtook his companion. Thinking that they had reasons for not inviting me to accompany them, I kept sitting on the hill, and watching a heavy, dark cloud rise from behind the woods and spread quietly, sadly, imperceptibly, almost stealthily over the sky, and then I went on alone, regretting the controversy with Andrey Ivanovich.

It was quiet and sad. The grain waved and

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rustled drily. In the distance, behind the woods, growled the thunder and at times a large drop of rain fell.

It was an empty threat. Towards evening I came to the village of K. and it had not rained yet, but the cloud was advancing quietly and spreading out; it grew dark and the thunder sounded nearer and nearer.

III

To my surprise, on the bank of earth around one of the first huts of the village, I saw Andrey Ivanovich, with his long legs reaching almost to the very middle of the street. As I approached, he looked utterly unconcerned.

“What are you doing, Andrey Ivanovich?”

“Drinking tea. Did you think I was waiting for you? Don’t flatter yourself. When the cloud passes, I’m going on.”

“Fine.”

“And your adored——”

“Who?”

“Those wanderers, people of God. . . . Please see what they’re doing in that hut! Go, look: it’s nothing; don’t be ashamed. . . .”

I walked up to the window. The hut was full.

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The peasants of the village were all away on business and so there were only women present. A few young women and girls were still running back and forth past me. The windows were open and illuminated, and I could hear within the even voice of Avtonomov. He was teaching the dissenters.

"Come, join us," I suddenly heard the low voice of Ivan Ivanovich. He was standing in a dark corner near the gate.

"What are you doing?"

"Fooling the people. That's what they're doing," interrupted Andrey Ivanovich.

The little wanderer coughed, and, squinting at Andrey Ivanovich, he said:

"What can we do, sir?"

He bent toward me and whispered:

"The old dissenters think Gennady Sergeich is a runaway priest. It's dark. What can we do? We may not get anything. And, besides, there's nothing else to do. Won't you come in?"

"Let's go in, Andrey Ivanovich."

"What I haven't seen there?" he answered, turning away. "Go,—kiss them. I think enough of myself not to do this, for I wear a cross."

"So do we," Ivan Ivanovich spoke with a mild tone of reproach.

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Andrey Ivanovich whistled suspiciously, and then, with a serious look on his face, he called to me:

“Do you know this disreputable crowd?”

With an enigmatic glance at me, he added in a lower tone:

“Did you understand?”

“No, I didn’t. Good-bye. If you want to, wait for me.”

“We’ve nothing to wait for. Some people don’t understand. . . .”

I didn’t hear the rest of the sentence, because I went into the hut with Ivan Ivanovich.

Our entrance caused some excitement. The preacher noticed me and stopped.

“Oh! We thank you,” he said, pushing the women aside. “Please. Won’t you have a little cup of tea? Here’s the samovar, even though it’s a dissenting village.”

“Did I disturb you?”

“What nonsense. Woman, bring the samovar! Quick!”

“Do you use that weed, too?” asked a young woman with a full bosom and bashful, coal-black eyes, who was standing in the front.

“If the gentleman will permit,—it will give me pleasure, . . . and I’ll drink another. . . .”

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"If you please," I said.

"Please give me a cigarette."

I gave it to him. He lighted it and looked laughingly at the surprised women. A murmur of dissatisfaction ran through the hut.

"Do you suck that?" asked the young woman spitefully.

"Of course. . . . According to the Scriptures, it is permitted."

"In what part?—teach us, please."

He smoked on and then he threw the cigarette over the heads of the women into a basin of water.

"He's thrown it away," said the hostess, fussing around the samovar.

"Don't throw it away, fool; you'll set the place on fire," interrupted another.

"Afire? If the well won't stop that, you'd better put out the fire in the kitchen."

"What are you thinking of? Everything is done nowadays. Even the priests smoke."

"Of course, of course. You've a voice like a bell. You ought to be in a convent choir. Come with me."

He reached for her. She cleverly turned aside, bending her beautiful form, while the other women, laughing and spitting, ran out of the hut.

"W-what a priest," said a thin woman with

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childishly open eyes. She was in evident terror.
"T-teacher!"

"Yes, he'll teach us."

"Teach us," laughed a soldier's wife, coming forward and resting her cheek on her fat hand.

"Teach us something easy and sweet."

"Yes! We'll sigh for you."

"I'll teach you. What is your name, beauty?"

"I'm called what I'm called and nicknamed Gray Duck. What do you want?"

"You, Gray Duck. Give us some vodka,—heavens, they'll pay up."

"Get what? We'll get it."

She looked at me questioningly and cunningly.

"Please, a little," I said.

The soldier's wife hurried from the hut. Laughing and pushing, two or three women ran out after her. The hostess looked displeased but she put the samovar on the table and without a word she sat down on the bench and commenced to work. The children watched us curiously from their plank beds.

Laughing and panting, the soldier's wife put on the table a bottle of some sort of greenish liquid. Then she walked away from the table and looked at us laughingly and boldly. Ivan Ivanovich coughed from embarrassment and the temporary

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widows still in the hut gazed at us in secret expectation. After the first cups, the preacher of the evening lifted the skirts of his cassock and stamped around the Gray Duck, who avoided his caresses.

"Go away!" She waved her hand, and, with a provokingly challenging glance at me, she walked up to the table.

"Why don't you drink? Look at them,—they'll finish it, I bet. Go ahead and drink."

Smiling and shrugging her shoulders, she filled a glass and brought it to me.

"Don't drink!" These words, in an unexpectedly venomous tone, came through the window, and out of the darkness appeared the bony face of Andrey Ivanovich.

"Don't drink the vodka, I tell you!" he repeated, still more sternly, and again disappeared in the darkness.

The soldier's wife let the glass tremble and spill. Thoroughly frightened she looked out of the window.

"May the power of the cross help us,—what was that?"

Everyone felt ill at ease. The vodka was exhausted and the question was whether to get more and continue, or to end now. Ivan Ivanovich

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looked at me in timid sorrow, but I had not the slightest desire to continue this feast. Avtonomov suddenly understood this.

"Really,—it's time to be going," he said, walking towards the window.

"But it's raining outdoors," said the soldier's wife, glancing to one side.

"No. The clouds are all right; . . . they look dry. . . . Get ready, Ivan Ivanovich."

We began to get ready. Ivan Ivanovich went out first. When I followed him into the dark, closed yard, he took my hand and said in a low tone:

"There's that long-legged fellow waiting by the gate.

In very truth I made out Andrey Ivanovich by the entrance. Avtonomov, with his wallet and staff, came out on the porch, holding the soldier's wife by the hand. Both figures could be seen in the lighted doorway. The soldier's wife did not withdraw her hand.

"Are you going to leave us?" she said in despair. "We thought—you'd carouse around here."

"Wait, I'll be back,—I'll get rich."

She looked at him and shook her head.

"Where? You'll never get rich. You'll get along, empty. . . ."

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"Don't caw, you crow. . . . Tell me this: does Irina's clerk still live by the cemetery?"

"Stchurovskaya? Yes. He just went to the bazaar. What do you want?"

"This. Let's see. . . . He had a daughter, Grunyushka."

"She's married."

"Nearby?"

"To a deacon in the village of Voskresenskoye. The old woman's there alone."

"You say Irina's husband hasn't come back?"

"He hasn't been seen."

"Is he rich?"

"No, he lives like everyone else."

"Good-bye! . . . Glasha-a!"

"Now, now! Don't call. . . . You know Glasha is good and not yours. Go along. There's nothing to hang around for."

Kindly pity could be heard in the voice of the village beauty.

Outside the dark figure of Andrey Ivanovich left the gate and hurried towards us, while at the same time Avtonomov overtook us and silently went ahead of us.

"You should have stayed till morning," remarked Andrey Ivanovich grimly. "I could have waited here!"

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"That's foolish," I answered coldly.

"How so? Why?"

"Why?—you could have gone on if you didn't like it."

"No, thanks for your kindness, I'm not willing to leave a companion. . . . I'd rather suffer myself than leave him. . . . We've been together three years, Ivan Anisimovich. Trifles don't count, I've drunk so often in good company. . . ."

"Yes?"

"They took off my vest; three rubles twenty. . . . A new pocket book. . . ."

"If you're blaming Gennady and me for this," began Ivan Ivanovich, hurriedly and excitedly, "that's so mean. Why? . . . If you have any doubts, we can go ahead or stay behind. . . ."

"Please don't pay any attention," I said, wishing to quiet the poor fellow.

"What's the matter?" asked Avtonomov, stopping. "What are you talking about?"

"They're so suspicious. Lord, have mercy upon us! Are we really robbers, the Lord forgive the word?"

Gennady gazed in the darkness into the face of Andrey Ivanovich.

"Oh, the lanky gentleman! . . . I see!" he said drily. "The man who never trusts has pleasure,

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if all he judges by his measure.' . . . The road is broad. . . ."

He again walked forward quickly and his timid little companion ran after him. Andrey Ivanovich waited for several seconds. He was surprised that the stranger had answered in rhythm. He almost started after him, but I caught his hand.

"What's the matter with you?" I said angrily.

"You're sorry for your good companions?" he said spitefully. "Please, don't be uneasy. They won't go far. . . ."

In very truth we caught sight of a black figure near the last houses. It was Ivan Ivanovich, alone.

He was standing in the road, panting and coughing and holding on to his breast.

"What's the matter?" I asked sympathetically.

"Oh, oh! My death! . . . He went off. . . . Gennady. . . . He ordered me not to go with him. . . . To go with you. I can't catch him."

"That's all right. Do you know the road?"

"It's the broad road. He hurried on some place or other."

"Fine."

We walked along in the darkness. . . . A dog barked behind us; I looked around and saw in the

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darkness two or three lights in the village, but they soon disappeared.

IV

It was a quiet, starless night. The horizon could still be traced as an indistinct line beneath the clouds, but still lower hung a thick mist, endless, shapeless, without form or details.

We walked on quite a while in silence. The wanderer panted timidly and tried to smother his cough.

"I don't see Avtonomov," he kept saying, and he gazed helplessly in the blackness of the night.

"We can't see him. . . . But he sees us, by heavens," said Andrey Ivanovich, spitefully and ominously.

The road seemed to be a confused streak, like a bridge across an abyss. . . . Everything around was black and indistinct. Was there or was there not a light streak on the horizon? There was not a trace of it now. Was it so short a time, since we were in that noisy hut with the laughter and conversation? . . . Will there be any end to this night, to this field? Were we moving ahead or was the road like an endless ribbon slipping

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by under our feet while we remained treading in the same spot, in the same enchanted patch of darkness? An involuntary, timid joy sprang up in my soul when an unseen brook began to babble ahead of us, when this murmur increased and then died away behind us, or when a sudden breath of wind stirred the scarcely visible clumps of willows beside the road and then died away, a sign that we had passed them. . . .

"It's night now all right," said Andrey Ivanovich quietly, and this was very unusual for him. "A man's a fool to walk the roads a night like this. And what are we after, I'd like to know. We worked during the day, rested, drank our tea, prayed—for sleep. No, I don't like it—and then we started along the roads. It's better for us. Here it's midnight and we haven't crossed ourselves yet. We certainly pray! . . ."

I made no answer. Thoughts of repentance seemed still to be running through the head of Andrey Ivanovich.

"Women can teach us a little," he said sternly. "We don't stay at home. What do we want? . . ."

"Why, I can't see Avtonomov," interrupted the plaintive voice of the young wanderer.

"Neither can I," grunted Andrey Ivanovich.

"What a misfortune!" said the young wan-

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derer sorrowfully. "I've been abandoned by my protector. . . ."

His voice was so filled with despair that we both looked ahead involuntarily in search of the lost Avtonomov. Suddenly, rather to one side, we heard a dull sound as if some one had stepped upon an old bridge.

"There he is!" said Andrey Ivanovich. "He went to the left."

"The road must have turned."

In truth the road soon forked. We also turned to the left. Ivan Ivanovich sighed from relief.

"What are you grieving so over?" asked Andrey Ivanovich. "Is he your brother or who is he? He's a freak, begging your pardon."

"He's closer than a brother. I'd be lost without him; I can't beg myself. And in our condition not to—is absolute ruin. . . ."

"Why do you wander around?"

The stranger was silent as if it were hard for him to answer this question.

"I'm looking for a shelter. In some monastery. . . . Since my youth I have been destined for the monastic life."

"You should live in a monastery."

"I have a weakness," said Ivan Ivanovich, almost inaudibly and bashfully.

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"You like drink."

"Yes, that's it. I was spoiled as a child."

"Too bad! . . . The devil's to blame for it."

"Yes, the devil. . . . Of course. . . . Formerly, when the people were serfs, *he* had a lot of work: he wrestled with the monotonous life, we'll say. . . . They all saw him. . . . And, just think, they struggled just the same. . . . Now it's our weakness. . . . The people are all inclined to it."

"Y-yes," assented Andrey Ivanovich. "It's much easier now for the impure. . . . He lives with us, by heavens. Lie, dear, on the stove. . . . We'll come to see you and bring one another. . . . Only entertain us."

The stranger heaved a deep sigh.

"That is the truth!" he said sadly. "I'll tell you about myself," he whispered, as if he did not wish his words to be heard by any one in the blackness along the road. "Do you know who ruined me? My own mother and my father superior!"

"Wh-what?" queried Andrey Ivanovich, also in a low tone.

"Yes! . . . I know it's sinful to blame my dead mother,—may she rest in peace!" He took off his hat and crossed himself. "And yet I keep thinking: if she had had me taught a trade, I might

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have been a man like the others. . . . No, she wanted her child to have an easy life, the Lord forgive her. . . .”

“Go on, go on!” urged Andrey Ivanovich.

“You know,” continued Ivan Ivanovich sadly, “in old times, as the books say, parents always objected and children went secretly to the monastic cell to devote themselves. . . . But my mother took me herself to the monastery; she wanted me to become a clerk.”

“Yes, yes!”

“And before that, I must tell you, they used to make them psalmists and so on, . . . but they had changed by my time!”

“That’s the rank!”

“Yes! . . . And mother again! stay there in the monastery. . . . That’s an easy life. And the superior loves you. . . . That’s the truth: the father superior did love me and took me as a novice under his own charge. But if a man is doomed, fortune will become misfortune. I’ll tell you the truth: I fell because of an angel . . . not because of the devil. . . .”

“What are you telling us?” said Andrey Ivanovich in surprise.

“Just the truth. . . . Our superior was a wonderfully kind soul, not evil, and strict. . . . But

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he had a secret weakness; at times he'd drink. Quietly, nobly. He'd shut himself up and drink for three or four days. No more than that. Then he'd all at once stop it. . . . He was a strong man. . . . But once, in that condition, he got bored. And he called me and said: 'Dear boy, mortify yourself. Vanya, obey me and do something you don't want to. An innocent boy, stay with me, a hardened sinner.' Well, I did it, and sat and listened how he talked with some one and wept over that weakness of his. . . . I wasn't strong, and when I got tired I fell asleep. He said: 'Vanya, take a drop to brace you up.' And I drank a glass of brandy. . . . 'But swear to me,' he said, 'that you'll never drink a drop alone without me.' "

"So that's it," drawled Andrey Ivanovich meaningly.

"Of course I swore. And he gave me another glass. . . . And so it went. At first a little, then—— The father superior was a strong man. No matter how much he drank, he was still steady. But, you know, after three or four glasses, my feet went. . . . He remembered himself and forbade me solemnly. It was too late. I didn't drink with him and I had the keys to the chest. . . . I began to take a nip secretly. . . . Another

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and a larger one. . . . A second time I couldn't walk. He thought at first that it was from that first drunkenness, because of my weakness. Then he looked at me steadily and said: 'Vanyusha, do you want a glass?' I trembled all over from my longing for it. He guessed the truth. He took his staff, caught it in my hair, and reasoned with me. . . . He was strong and afraid of hurting me. . . . It did no good. Again and again. . . . He saw that his weakness was ruining me. He said to me: 'Forgive me, Vanyushka, but you must pass through temptation or you'll be ruined. . . . Go and wander. . . . When you meet sorrow you can be healed. I will pray for you. Come back in a year,' he said, 'on this same date. I will receive you like the prodigal son.' He blessed me. Began to weep. Called the rufalny, that is, the monk who had charge of the habits, and ordered him to get me ready to wander. . . . He himself said the prayers for a brother who is going on a journey. . . . And forth I went, the servant of the Lord, on the twenty-ninth of August, the day of the Beheading of St. John Baptist, for a period of wandering. . . ."

The narrator again stopped, drew his breath, and coughed. Andrey Ivanovich sympathetically stopped walking and the three of us stood in the

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dark road. Finally Ivan Ivanovich was rested and we started on again. . . .

"So I traveled summer and winter. It was hard work and I had many sorrows. Yes! I went to various monasteries. Some places I didn't get into the courtyard,—others I didn't like. Our monastery was supported by the state and rich and I'd gotten accustomed to an easy life. And I couldn't get into another state monastery, but they took me into one where all the monks lived together, that of St. Cyril of Novoye Ozero, and it was awful: we got little tea and not a bit of tobacco; the monks were all peasants. . . . A hard rule and a lot of work. . . ."

"I bet you didn't like that after your easy life," said Andrey Ivanovich.

"To tell the truth, I wasn't strong enough," sighed Ivan Ivanovich humbly. "The burden was too great. . . . And sanctity looked unpleasant in that garb. There was no splendor. . . . A lot of people and no choir. . . . They did make an awful noise. . . ."

"That's sanctity!" said Andrey Ivanovich with conviction.

"No, let me tell you," answered Ivan Ivanovich no less emphatically. . . . "You're wrong. . . . That doesn't determine the kind of monastery. A

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monk must be trained and have a head like a blade of grass . . . and hold himself up. . . . That makes a fine monk and there's mighty few of them. And the simple monk is smooth and clean with a velvety voice. Benefactors and women go wild over them. But a peasant, let me tell you, is no account even there. . . ."

"All right. . . . What next?" said Andrey Ivanovich, a little surprised at the decided opinion of the expert.

"What next?" answered the wanderer sadly. "I wandered for a year. I fasted and wandered. . . . The worst was that my conscience bothered me; I didn't know how to beg. I waited and waited for that year to end,—to go home, home, to my poor cell. I thought of the father superior as if he were my own father; I loved him so. Finally August twenty-ninth came. I went into the courtyard, you know, and somehow I felt badly. Our attendants came to the gate. . . . They knew me. 'Wanderer Ivan, have you returned?'. 'I have,' was my reply. 'Is my benefactor alive?' 'Too late,' was the answer. 'He was buried some time ago. He was deemed worthy; he went away with the collect of the Resurrection. He remembered you . . . and wept. . . . He wanted to reward you. . . . We've got a new superior, . . . a

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barbarian. Don't let him see you?' But," he added, plaintively, "I can't see Avtonomov."

His voice betrayed his terror and sorrow.

V

Andrey Ivanovich stared into the darkness and suddenly he caught hold of my hand, exclaiming:

"Stop! We shouldn't have come."

"What's the matter?"

"I told the truth. Don't chase on after them! Wait for me. . . . I'll run and see. . . ."

He quickly disappeared in the darkness. I stayed with Ivan Ivanovich in the road. When the steps of the bootmaker died away, we heard merely the quiet noises of the night. The grass rustled gently; at times a rail whistled as it ran nervously from place to place. In the vague distance the frogs were croaking dreamily and playing in the swamp. Hardly visible clouds were rising.

"That's just like him. . . . My comrade loves to walk at night," complained Ivan Ivanovich.

"What's the use of it? Why not by day?"

"Was he in a monastery too?"

"Yes," answered Ivan Ivanovich. Then, with a sigh, "He's from a good family. His father

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was a deacon in the city of N. You may have heard of him. . . . His brother is a secretary in a police office. He was betrothed. . . .”

“Why didn’t he marry?”

“Don’t you see, he’d already gone wrong. . . . He ran away . . . but he wasn’t a wanderer yet. He had the outfit but he didn’t wander. . . . He passed as a suitor. He was accepted. The girl loved him, and her father didn’t object. . . . Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Of course, it was sinful, . . . he deceived them. Sometimes, when he tells about it, you’ll cry, and then again it’s really funny.”

Ivan Ivanovich acted strangely. He laughed and then began to choke and put his hand over his mouth. At first you could hardly tell he was laughing. But he really was,—an hysterical, bashful, rather explosive laugh, which ended like a cough. When he quieted down, Ivan Ivanovich said, half-pityingly:

“Only he tells it different every time. . . . You can’t tell whether it’s the truth or not.”

“He wouldn’t lie?”

“Not exactly, . . . but he’s not always accurate. You see, the truth——”

“Just what does he say?”

“You know, the clerk, he says, was clever. He saw the young man wasting his time, really doing

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nothing. He pretended to go to a bazaar,—so he went to the city, left the old woman in the house, and gave her strict orders to keep an eye on him. Avtonomov, you see, didn't live with them, but in the village with the woman who baked the bread for the church. . . . He kept visiting them. . . . Every day. . . . They'd sit by the river bank. . . . And the old woman was there, too. And, of course, she watched them. . . . One time, my dear little Avtonomov saw two men coming from the city in a cart—and both drunk. They came up and turned out to be the clerk and his older brother, the secretary. He hadn't even looked around—when they landed on him and licked him. The reason why: his brother, because he ran away from the seminary; the clerk, for deceiving and disgracing him. . . .”

Ivan Ivanovich sighed.

“He hardly got off alive, he says. . . . They were both angry and drunk. . . . He ran to the house where he was living, grabbed his wallet, and off into the woods. . . . Since then, he says, he's been wandering. . . . But, another time, he really . . . tells something else.”

He came nearer to me and wanted to tell me something very confidentially. But suddenly out of the darkness near us came the figure of Andrey

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Ivanovich. He walked rapidly with a deliberately menacing scowl.

"Come here, if you please." He took me aside and whispered:

"You and I are in a nice mess!"

"How?"

"This Avtonomov, the monk, seems to have gone off to steal. . . . We'll get into trouble over him yet. . . ."

"That's enough, Andrey Ivanovich."

"Yes, for you. Did you hear what he asked in the village? Of the soldier's wife? About a certain clerk? Is the clerk actually at home or not?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Do you remember where that clerk lived?"

"Yes, by a cemetery."

"There it is!" said Andrey Ivanovich maliciously, pointing ahead in the darkness.

"What of it?"

"Just this. . . . The old woman, you heard, is alone. . . . And he went right there. . . . He walked around the yard and looked. You'll see for yourself. . . . That's the sort of a fellow you wanted to drop an old companion for. . . . If he'd crossed the bridge without a board creaking, we'd have gone straight along the road. . . . I turned aside. . . . Let's go ahead quietly."

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Behind us some one coughed plaintively. Andrey Ivanovich looked around and said:

"Come with us, novice. . . . What can we do with you? You love your comrade."

We crossed the bridge, followed the road and came to the cemetery. On the hill a little light shone through the trees. I saw the whitish walls of a small house, perched on the edge of a hill, and behind it was the dark outline of a bell-tower. Below on the right it was easier to imagine than to see the little stream.

"There he is," said Andrey Ivanovich. "Do you see him?"

Not far from us, between the wall and the slope, near an arbor covered with foliage, was a figure. A man seemed to be crowded against and fastened to the fence and looking through the bushes. By the light of the window, I saw the pointed cap, the long neck, and the familiar profile of Avtonomov. The light streamed out through the trees and lilac blossoms. When I went nearer, I saw in the window the head of an old woman in a cap and with horn spectacles. Her head nodded like that of a man who is working when he is terribly sleepy, and the needles moved rapidly in her hands. The old woman was evidently waiting for her husband to return.

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Suddenly she listened. . . . An irresolute call came out of the darkness:

“Olimpiada Nikolayevna!”

The old woman looked out of the window but saw no one.

A moment of silence, and then the same call was repeated:

“Olimpiada Nikolayevna!”

I did not recognize Avtonomov's voice. It seemed soft and timid.

“Who's there?” The old woman suddenly started. “Who called me?”

“It's I. . . . Don't you remember Avtonomov? . . . We used to know each other. . . .”

“Avtonomov, mercy. . . . We never knew any one of that name. . . . I don't know you. . . . Wait a moment and I'll call some one. Fedosya, oh, Fedosya! . . . Come here quick. . . .”

“Don't call, mother. . . . I won't disturb you. . . . Have you really forgotten Avtonomov? . . . I used to be called Genasha. . . .”

The old woman got up, took the candle and held it out of the window. There was no breeze. The flame burned steadily and illuminated the bushes, the walls of the house, and the wrinkled face of the old woman with her glasses pressed up on her forehead.

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"That voice sounded familiar. . . . Where are you? . . . If you're a good man——"

She held the candle above her head and the light fell on Avtonomov. The old woman staggered, but just then another woman entered the room. The old woman grew bolder and again threw the light on Avtonomov.

"Fine," she said coldly. "The suitor, of course. . . . What are you walking around under the window for? . . ."

"I happened to be passing, Olimpiada Nikolayevna——"

"Passing, and would pass. . . . See here, when the master returns, he'll set the dogs on you."

She closed the window and lowered the curtain. The bushes disappeared, and the figure of Avtonomov was lost in the darkness.

We could then think of leaving, and we quickly descended the hillock. . . . In a few minutes we heard the bells in the tower. Some one apparently wanted to show that there were people in the cemetery. . . .

Andrey Ivanovich walked slowly and thoughtfully. Ivan Ivanovich ran panting at a dog trot and constantly stifling his cough. . . . When we had reached a proper distance he stopped and said again with indescribable sorrow:

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"We've lost Avtonomov. . . ."

His voice was so despairing that Andrey Ivanovich and I involuntarily felt sorry for him. We stopped and began to peer into the darkness.

"He's coming," said Andrey Ivanovich, straining his lynx-like eyes.

In very truth we soon saw behind us a strange shape like a moving tree. Avtonomov had large bunches of lilacs in his belt, on his shoulders, and in his hands, and even his cap was decorated with flowers. When he caught up with us he had perfect control of himself and seemed neither glad nor astonished. He walked on along the road and the branches waved about him in a very peculiar manner.

"It's great to walk at night, signor," he began grandiloquently, like an actor. "The fields are clothed in darkness. . . . There's a grove on one side. . . . See how peaceful it is! The nightingale pours forth its melody. . . ."

He almost declaimed this but yet his voice showed that he was a little exasperated.

"Wouldn't you like a spray from my garden, signor?"

With a theatrical gesture, he offered me a branch of lilacs.

Near the road a nightingale sang timidly and

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irresolutely. In the distance, in answer to the bells from the cemetery, came another, and we could hear the noise of a rattle. Somewhere on the dark plain dogs were barking. . . . The night grew darker and it began to feel like rain. . . .

"I'm sorry," Avtonomov suddenly began at random, "I got separated from you by the cemetery. I have an old friend who lives there, a real old friend. If he'd been home, we'd all have gotten lodging and something to eat. . . . The old woman asked me to stop, . . . but without her husband——"

Ivan Ivanovich cleared his throat. The boot-maker snorted ironically.

Avtonomov must have guessed that we had seen more than he thought, for he turned to me and said:

"Judge not, signor, that ye be not judged. . . . Another's soul, signor, is dark. . . . Some time," he added resolutely, "believe me, I'll come here, . . . and I'll be entertained. . . . And then. . . ."

"And then?"

"Oh! . . . we'll be entertained. . . . Drink till you can't see. . . . And I'll crow over it. . . ."

"Why?"

"Why! This place should be like any other.

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But yet, signor, it appeals to me. . . . The past. . . .”

He walked on more rapidly.

We passed by a little village and reached the last hut. Its small windows looked out sightlessly into the dark field. . . . All were sleeping within.

Avtonomov suddenly walked up to the window and tapped sharply on the pane. An indistinct face appeared behind it.

“Who’s there?” asked a dull voice, and a frightened face was pressed against the glass. “Who’s coming around this time of night?”

“The d-devil,” drawled Avtonomov in a piercing, evil tone, and he stuck his head with its floral decorations against the pane. . . . The face within disappeared in terror. . . . Dogs began to bark in the village; the guard struck his rattle; the dark plain went on guard. . . . Again somewhere in the distance the sleeping churches droned forth their prolonged notes, as if to defend the peaceful region from some unknown evil. As if they felt that above them was hanging the menace of certain dark and hopelessly ruined lives.

VI

We walked for more than an hour through the dark fields. Weariness claimed its own and we

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neither wished to speak nor listen. At first I kept on thinking and tried in the darkness to imagine the appearance of my companions. This worked with Andrey Ivanovich, whom I knew well, and also with the little wanderer, but I had forgotten the features of Avtonomov, and as I looked at his dark form I could not recall his face. . . . Avtonomov at the clerk's house and yesterday's preacher seemed two distinct people.

My thoughts became still more confused; several days of tramping,—the dull night, the silence, the heavy, muddy road or the absence of one,—this was all that I could learn from my great weariness, and I began to lose myself as I walked along. It was a sort of semi-consciousness which permitted fantastic dreams strangely intertwined with reality. But reality for me was merely the dark road and three misty shapes, now behind me, now driving me onward. . . . I went with them almost unconsciously.

When I partially awoke, they were standing in the road and arguing.

“Open your eyes,” said the bootmaker, angrily but lazily.

“Thanks for your explanation,—I wouldn't have guessed it,” answered the wanderer. “Don't you know, signor, how to get to the road?”

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I looked out lazily into the darkness. With its arms disappearing among the clouds, a huge black windmill towered above us; behind and beside it were others. I thought the whole field was dotted with windmills, silent but menacing. . . .

"I've been spitting all night to beat this devil," said Andrey Ivanovich venomously.

"Well, just keep still a little while, lanky signor," said Avtonomov. "Listen! . . ."

"Grinding?" said Andrey Ivanovich questioningly. . . .

"Right," answered Avtonomov cheerfully. "The wheels are working. What a jolly little river!"

"Is it far?"

"Yes, by the road. We'll take a short cut."

"You'll land us in the swamp, you devil. . . ."

My feet carried me through the darkness after the three dark figures. I stumbled over the stubble or the hummocks, and they threw me forward or to the side. . . . If I had met a ravine or a river,— I would probably have waked up at the bottom. . . . At times strange phantoms leaped and flew from my head into the unshapen fog.

Finally I ceased to stumble over hummocks. I felt a level road beneath my feet and I heard an even, kindly hum. Water was pouring, roaring,

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running, splashing and foaming, telling of something interesting, but too confused. . . . The noise stopped, but suddenly it became louder, as if the water were pouring through a dam. . . . I woke up completely and looked around in surprise. . . . Andrey Ivanovich caught me from behind. He took my arm and pushed me ahead. . . .

"Wake up . . . you'll sleep when you're walking. . . . We're tied up with the devil and may God forgive us! . . . If the peasants come out, they'll break our necks. . . . Quick, quick. . . . See Ivan Ivanovich go with his cassock held up. . . ."

Indeed, the little wanderer was running with a speed that surprised me.

"Here . . . here. . . ."

Without understanding what had happened, I found myself hidden in the thick willows on the bank of a little stream. Ivan Ivanovich was panting. . . . Avtonomov was not with us. Near by the mill was roaring. The water raged and poured through the open sluices. One wheel was turning heavily as before,—another seemed locked,—it trembled and groaned beneath the assaults of the water. A dog was pulling at his chain and howling with anger.

A window in the mill lighted up as if the building

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had waked and opened one eye. A door creaked and the old miller in a white shirt and trousers came out on the platform with a lantern. Behind him came another man, yawning and stretching.

"Did the dam go out?" he asked.

"It certainly did,—hear it roar in the sluiceways; it almost broke the bars. . . . Just look. . . . Oh, ye saints. . . ."

"Just look; they're open."

"What the devil! Who opened them?"

The peasants went to the sluices. The roar soon died away; they pushed both bolts and the mill stopped. The light of the lantern slowly crawled back along the dam and again disappeared. Then a rattle sounded shrilly. One peasant was evidently still on guard. . . .

The unusual commotion at the mill, sounding across the fields, again roused the sleeping villages. It was surprising how many of them were hidden in the darkness. From all sides, in front, behind, almost beneath, they answered the alarm with the beating of boards and rattles. The slow peal of a bell floated up from a distant village or a cemetery. Near by some night bird called.

"Let's go," said Andrey Ivanovich, when the mill had become quiet. . . . "One rascal can so disturb people."

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"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Ask him," said the bootmaker spitefully, and he pointed to Ivan Ivanovich.

"Y-yes," answered the wanderer sadly. "Of course, it's outrageous. . . . I don't approve of it. . . ."

"What's the matter? Where's Avtonomov?"

"There he is—calling like a bird and making signs to us. . . . Come here, my dear companions. . . . How the rascal managed to open the sluices, I didn't happen to notice. You, too! . . . You'll follow him and sleep. If you'd kept on . . . and the peasants had appeared before,—there'd have been a picnic. You bet! I'll catch that devil and don't you interfere. I'll turn him inside out and run his feet out through his throat! . . .

He started ahead with his mind made up.

VII

Andrey Ivanovich did not carry out his savage intentions and in a half hour we were again walking silently along the road. . . . It was not yet sunrise, but the white, milky streaks kept breaking through the clouds, and beneath our feet we could see the whitish fog which covered the whole plain. Suddenly the fog opened and showed

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us a horse's head and a cart loaded with sacks and a peasant sleeping on them and another empty cart behind it.

"Uncle, hey, uncle," said Andrey Ivanovich to the second peasant, "won't you take us along?"

The peasant rubbed his sleepy eyes and looked with amazement at the crowd which had surrounded him.

"Where did God bring you from?"

"A pilgrimage."

"So, so! Sit down, but I can't take you far; we're from around here."

"You're not from the mill?"

"They were at the mill, but I'm empty. Sit down; that's right."

We got into the cart and sat down, letting our feet hang.

"Let me ask you a question," said our guide, clucking to his horse; "have you been walking all night?"

"Yes."

"You didn't hear anything, did you?"

"Some dogs barking in the distance. Why?"

"Why? Some one opened the sluices in the mill and almost smashed the wheels."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know! Some one got fooling around at

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night. In our little village near by, they say, the fellow asked to be taken in. A peasant looked out, but he said: 'I'm the devil, let me in.' "

"He was," said Avtonomov, who had discarded his decorations some time before.

"He wasn't. . . . I'll never believe it. . . . And I won't let you either." Andrey Ivanovich spoke ardently and decidedly to the peasant. "Some rascals have been deceiving you country people. . . . Your simplicity . . ."

"There are people who do not believe in God and the Saints," said Avtonomov, with the greatest humility and composure.

Andrey Ivanovich gritted his teeth and showed Avtonomov his fist, when the peasant was not looking.

VIII

About noon we reached my home in the same kind of a cart. This we had happened to meet at the edge of the city. The cart stopped at the gate. Our picturesque company attracted the attention of several passers-by, a thing that clearly annoyed Andrey Ivanovich. . . . I asked my companion to come in and rest and have some tea.

"Thanks, I haven't far to go," answered the

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bootmaker coldly. He threw his wallet on his back and, then, without ceremony, he pointed at Avtonomov.

“Are you inviting him in?”

“Yes, I’m inviting Gennady Sergeyevich,” I answered.

Andrey Ivanovich turned sharply and, without saying good-bye, he started down the street.

Ivan Ivanovich looked desperately frightened, as if my invitation had caught him in a trap. He looked appealingly at Avtonomov, and shame at being present tortured his whole figure. Avtonomov asked simply:

“Where are we going?”

While the samovar was being heated, I asked the servants to gather up some superfluous clothes and linen and offered my companions a change of attire. Avtonomov at once consented, tied them all in one bundle and said:

“We’ve got to have a bath. . . .”

Of course, I did not object. Both wanderers came back from the bath transformed. Ivan Ivanovich, in a coat which was too broad and trousers which were too long and with his thin hair, looked astonishingly like a woman in man’s clothes. As far as Avtonomov was concerned, he was not satisfied with the conventional amount of clothing, but he

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had put on everything which had been given him to choose from. He was wearing, consequently, a blue shirt, a blouse, two vests, and a coat. The shirt stuck up above the collar of the blouse and reached below it,—it was so much longer. The edge of the blouse was visible and the coat seemed to form a third layer. . . . At the tea table Ivan Ivanovich was so miserable that we let him take his cup into the kitchen, where he sat down in one corner and immediately won the sympathy of our cook.

Avtonomov acted recklessly, called my mother signora and jumped up every minute in order to serve something.

After tea he looked himself over from head to foot and said, with an air of satisfaction:

“In this costume my brother-in-law won’t be ashamed of me. . . . I’ll go see my sister. . . . She lives near here. May I leave my wallet in your hall, signora?”

When he went to the gate, Ivan Ivanovich ran after him in terror. After a short conversation Avtonomov permitted the poor fellow to follow him at some distance.

Ivan Ivanovich soon returned alone. His bird-like face beamed with surprise and delight.

“They received him,” he said, clearing his throat

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joyfully. "That's the solemn truth. He really has a sister. And a brother-in-law. . . . Please go past, accidentally. . . . You'll see it, too. . . . As God is true, they're sitting in a garden entertaining him . . . like a brother. His sister's weeping from joy. . . ."

From the breast of the little wanderer came strange sounds like hysterical laughing and weeping.

In an hour Avtonomov appeared, transfigured and triumphant. He came up to me, fervently grasped my hand, and pressed it till it hurt.

"Through you I've found my relatives. . . . Yes. . . . That's it! Till death. . . ."

He pressed my hand still harder, then convulsively released it and turned away. Apparently the brother-in-law, who was not without influence in the consistory, believed in Avtonomov's reformation and decided to help him. It was also necessary to get certain papers from Uglich and . . .

"Back here again! My wanderings are ended, signor. . . . I won't forsake you, Vanya. . . . I'll give you a corner and food. . . . Live. . . . I'll be responsible. . . . You'll get quarters . . . also . . ."

As I listened to this conversation, involuntary doubts crept into my mind, the more so as Avtonomov had resumed his grandiloquent manner and

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kept using more and more frequently the word signor. . . .

Towards evening the two set out "for Uglich to get the papers." Avtonomov gave me a solemn promise to return in a week "to begin his new life."

"Is this all that was necessary for this 'miracle?' " I thought doubtfully. . . .

IX

The weather suddenly changed. . . . A wonderful early spring seemed to be replaced by late, cold autumn. . . . It rained hard for days and the wind howled amid the rain and the fog.

One cold morning of this kind I awoke late and was trying to guess the time. when I heard a light noise and a strange whistle in the hall by the door. I opened and saw some living creature in a dark corner. Yes! it was Ivan Ivanovich. He trembled all over, was blue, and looked at me with his appealing, timid eyes. It was the look of a frightened animal near its end.

"Your weakness again?" I asked kindly.

"Yes," he answered humbly and briefly, and he started to straighten his clothing. He was again wearing an impossible cassock, he had no hat, and on his bare feet were rough shoes.

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Avtonomov soon made his appearance. He was drunk and unpleasantly bold. He spoke in affectedly grandiloquent phrases, acted like an old friend, and from time to time in his reminiscences of our wanderings he made spicy allusions to a certain soldier's wife. . . . In his eyes gleamed an evil passion and in him I recognized again the preacher in the monastery courtyard,—and readiness for any evil deed. He never said a word about his visit to his sister. . . .

"Listen . . . Dearie, . . ." he turned to the maid. . . . "The other time I left a cassock with you. . . . It's still fit to be worn. . . . Your present was unlucky," he added, looking impudently at me. . . . "We were robbed near Uglich . . . and they took absolutely everything we had. A merchant cheated you on those felt shoes, that's easy to see. . . . Cheap goods, cheap. . . . They fell all to pieces. . . ."

He condescendingly patted my shoulder.

Ivan Ivanovich looked at his protector reproachfully. We parted quite coldly, but everyone in my house felt sincere sympathy and pity for Ivan Ivanovich.

After that, from time to time, I heard from my accidental comrades. These messages were usually brought by people in cloaks and cassocks and with

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more or less clear indications of "weakness" they gave me greetings or notes and they showed how disillusioned they felt, when they saw the meagreness of the reward which they received. Once during the fair a fellow appeared totally drunk and very evil looking, but he handed me a note with as much mysterious familiarity as if it had been from a mutual friend and confidant.

In the note a very shaky and uneven hand had scribbled:

"Dear friend. Receive the bearer as you would me. He is our friend and can tell you everything; incidentally give him money and clothing. . . . His trousers are pretty bad. . . . Gennady Avtonomov."

One glance was enough to show that the agent was really in dire need of trousers. . . . But in spite of his intoxication, his eyes quickly and curiously ran over the contents of my rooms, and they showed well the results of professional training. . . .

When he left, I heard an unpleasant noise and I had to run to the assistance of my good neighbors.

X

About two years passed, before I again met my former companions.

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One hot summer's day, I had crossed the Volga on a ferry and a pair of horses was dragging us over the sands of the bank to the foot of a hill. The sun had set, but it was intolerably hot. It seemed as if whole waves of heat were being wafted from the gleaming river. Flies hung in clouds over the horses, the bells rang unevenly, and the wheels dragged in the deep sand. . . . Half way up the hill a monastery nestled among the trees and as it looked down on the river out of the rising mist, it seemed to be suspended in midair.

Suddenly the coachman stopped his weary team at the very foot of the hill and ran along the bank. A quarter of a verst away on the rocky and pebbly edge of the river was a black group of people directly between us and the sun.

"Something's happened," said my companion.

I got out and also walked up to the place.

A dead body was lying on the bare bank, against which the water was splashing lazily. When I came nearer, I recognized in it my old acquaintance: the little wanderer was lying in his cassock, on his stomach, with outstretched hands and with his head turned at an unnatural angle. He was pale as death; his black hair had fallen over his forehead and temples, and his mouth was half open. I involuntarily recalled that face, as it was

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when it was filled with childish delight over the singing of the little bird on the hilltop. With his long, sharp nose and his open mouth,—he reminded me greatly of a tortured and stifled bird.

Avtonomov sat swaying back and forth beside him and seemed frightened. There was a perceptible odor of wine in the air. . . .

Glancing at the people who were coming up and not recognizing me, he suddenly pulled the dead body.

“Get up, comrade, it’s time to be going. . . . A wanderer’s fate is to wander always.”

He spoke in a very bombastic manner, but he rose uncertainly. . . .

“Don’t you want to? Look, Vanya, I’ll leave you! I’ll go off alone. . . .”

A village chief, with a medal on his chest, hurried up to the group and laid one hand on Avtonomov’s shoulder.

“Stop, don’t go away. . . . You’ve got to make a statement. . . . What sort of people are you?”

Avtonomov, with ironical humility, took off his cap and bowed.

“Please be so kind, your village excellency. . . .”

Above our heads sounded a peal of the bell. The monks were being summoned to vespers. The peal echoed, disturbed the heated air, and rolled above

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the leafy tops of the oaks and black poplars beside the monastery and as it died away, it fell to the sleepy river. The sound increased again, as it struck the water, and a keen eye could almost follow its flight to the other bank, to the bluish, mist-wrapped meadows.

All removed their hats. Avtonomov turned toward the sound and shook his fist in the air.

"Listen, Vanya," he said, "your father superior is calling you. . . . Your benefactor. . . . Now he'll receive you, I know. . . ."

Peal after peal, rapid and repeated, ringing and quavering, fell down upon the river solemnly and quietly. . . .

ISN'T IT TERRIBLE?

(FROM THE DIARY OF A REPORTER)



ISN'T IT TERRIBLE?

(FROM THE DIARY OF A REPORTER)

I

r E IN N-sk on the twentieth. Session of dis-
r trict court. Details in letter. Editor."

I looked at my watch and then went to inquire about the trains. I hoped that I could not catch the night train at the station, which was some ten versts from the city where I had just finished another piece of reporting. I saw already the laconic and business-like answer: "Telegram delayed, cannot arrive on twentieth." Unfortunately the time-table and my watch decided differently. I had three hours to pack and get to the station. That was time enough.

About 11 o'clock on a warm summer evening a coachman landed me at the station; the lights could be seen for a great distance. I got there just in time; the train was waiting.

Directly opposite the entrance there was a car with the windows open. It was not filled and some intelligent-appearing men were playing cards. I

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imagined that they were members of the court going to the session, and I decided to look for a place elsewhere. This was no easy task but I finally succeeded. The train was just starting when, with my bag in my hand, I entered a second-class compartment in which there were three passengers.

I sat down by the window, through which entered the freshness of the summer night, and soon there were flying past me ends of sleepers, hills, roaring bridges, buildings, fields bathed in the moonlight,—all as if carried by a high wind. I was tired and sad. I thought how my life was flying in the same way, from bridge to bridge, from station to station, from city to city, from fire to law court. . . . And that I could never write for any paper what the editor wanted. And all that I would write the next day would be dry and uninteresting.

These were not cheerful thoughts. I tore myself away from them and began to listen to the conversation of my fellow travelers.

II

My nearest neighbor was sleeping contentedly, letting me stretch out as I could. Opposite me one passenger was lying down and another was sitting by the window. They kept on with the conversation they had already commenced.

ISN'T IT TERRIBLE?

"Let's imagine," said the one who was lying down, "that I am a man who is not superstitious. . . . But yet" (he yawned pleasantly and slowly) "it cannot be denied that there is much, so to speak, unknown,—isn't that so? . . . Let's suppose, the peasants . . . country naïvete and superstition. But take a paper. . . ."

"Well, a paper. Superstition is for peasants, but this is for the papers. A peasant, simple fellow, sees a primitive devil with horns and breathing fire. He's frightened. . . . A reporter sees a figure from the ballet. . . ."

The gentleman who admitted that there was "much unknown" yawned again.

"Yes," he said with a somewhat scientific air, "that is true; fears disappear with the development of culture and education. . . ."

His companion did not reply, but later said thoughtfully:

"Disappear? . . . Do you remember in Tolstoy: Anna Karenina and Vronsky have the identical dream: a peasant, an ordinary laborer 'works in steel' and speaks French. . . . Both wake up in terror. . . . What's so terrible there? Of course, it's a little strange for a peasant to speak French. But, granted. . . . Nevertheless, in a given combination of circumstances, a picture which is not

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frightful will terrify you. . . . Take the Brothers Karamazov of Dostoyevsky. . . . We've got there an urban devil. . . . You remember, of course. . . ."

"No, I don't. . . . You know, Pavel Semenovich, I'm an instructor of mathematics. . . ."

"Oh, excuse me. . . . I thought. . . . Yes, I remember: he was a certain man, or, better yet, a certain type of Russian gentleman, quite well along in years, with his hair and pointed beard rather gray. . . . His linen and necktie, you know, were like those of any other stylish gentleman, but his linen was rather dirty and his necktie frayed. To sum up, 'He looked like a man of taste with slender financial resources. . . .'"

"That's a fine devil! A mere sharper, and they're common enough," remarked the mathematician.

"Yes, I know there's a lot of them. . . . But it's frightful and it's that, just because it's so common; that same poor necktie, linen, and coat. . . . If it were only frayed, it would be like yours or mine. . . ."

"All right, Pavel Semenovich. . . . Excuse me, but you have a strange philosophy."

The mathematician seemed rather insulted. Pavel Semenovich turned towards the light, and I had a good view of his broad face, straight brows

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and gray, thoughtful eyes hidden under his stern forehead.

Both paused. For a little while you could hear only the hurried roar of the train. Then Pavel Semenovitch began again in his even voice.

"At the station of N-sk I happened, you know, to walk up toward the engine. I'm a little acquainted with the engineer. . . . A chronically sleepy individual with swollen eyes."

"Yes?" asked his companion indifferently, and not trying to conceal his feelings.

"Certainly. . . . A natural condition. He hadn't slept for thirty-six hours."

"M-n, yes. . . . That is a long while."

"I thought so too: we fall asleep. . . . The train is flying at full speed. . . . And it's run by a man who is almost stupefied. . . ."

His companion fidgeted a little.

"What an idea! . . . Really, damnation. . . . You should have told the chief of the station. . . ."

"What for? . . . He'd laugh! A common thing. You might almost call it the system. In Petersburg there's a gentleman sitting in some office. . . . He's got a board in front of him with numbers on it. Arrival. . . . Departure. . . . And the engineers are listed too. . . . Pay—so much.

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Versts—so many. Versts—that's the length of the run,—a useful number, profitable, steady, that can be increased. The pay for the men is minus. . . . And this fellow just cracks his head, thinking how to run the largest number of miles on the smallest number of engineers. Or even make the distance larger than ever. . . . It's a sort of silent game with numbers, so to speak. . . . And a most ordinary chap bothers with it. . . . He wears a poor coat and necktie, and he looks respectable. . . . A good friend and a fine husband. . . . He loves his child and gives presents to his wife on holidays. . . . His job is harmless, and he merely decides simple questions. The result is that sleep kills people. . . . And across the fields and through the ravines of our beloved country on such moonlight nights as this trains tear along like this, and the watch is kept by the sleepy, swollen eyes of the man who is responsible for hundreds of lives. . . . A moment's slumber. . . ."

The legs of the mathematician in their checkered trousers stirred: he got up from his seat in the shadow and sat down on a bench. . . . His fat, expressionless face, with its thick, clipped mustache, made you uneasy.

"Stop your croaking, for heaven's sake," he said angrily. "However you argue, the result is

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the same, devil take it. . . . I wanted to fall asleep. . . .”

Pavel Semenovitch looked at him in surprise.

“What’s the matter?” he said. “Are you crazy? We’ll get there all right, if God wills. I merely want to point out how the terrible and the usual are combined. . . . Economy is the most ordinary idea of life. . . . But sometimes it involves death. . . . It is even measurable by the law of probability. . . .”

The mathematician, still more angry, took out his cigar case and said, as he began to smoke:

“No, you’re right: the devil knows: the rascal’ll fall asleep, and all at once. . . . These beasts of railroad men. . . . O, let’s talk of something else. The devil take these fears. . . . Are you still vegetating in Tikhodol? . . . You’ve stuck there a long time. . . .”

“Yes.” answered Pavel Semenovitch, a little embarrassed. “It’s such a wretched place. It’s just like living in a yoke. . . . A teacher, prosecutor, excise official. . . . When you once land there, you’re forgotten, and removed from the lists of the living. . . .”

“Yes. . . . It is an awful place. . . . It’s deadening. . . . Why, there’s not even a club there. And the mud is unendurable.”

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"There's a club now, at least that's what we call it. . . . And there are a few stretches of pavement. . . . Lighting, especially in the centre of the town. . . . But, I'll confess, I live on the edge, and don't make much use of these conveniences."

"Where do you live?"

"With Budnikov, in the suburbs."

"Budnikov? Semen Nikolayevich? Just think, I lived in that section myself: with Father Polidorov. . . . Of course, I met Budnikov! A fine man, well educated, but rather—filled with ideas?"

"Yes, with a few notions. . . ."

"No, not that. . . . I said ideas. But notions. What? None special, I think."

"No, nothing special, but just the same: he used to keep valuable papers in a mattress. . . ."

"Why, I never knew that. But when I met him he made a queer impression on me. He was so fresh and original. . . . A house owner, and all of a sudden he went to living in two rooms without servants. . . . No, I remember, he had a kind of porter. . . ."

"Yes, Gavriilo. . . ."

"That's right, that's right. Gavriilo, a little fellow with white eyebrows? Yes? That's right. . . . I remember I liked to look at his face: such a good-natured snout. I almost thought the master

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was part workman. . . . Who is he? Is he always that way?"

Pavel Semenovitch said nothing for a few minutes. He then looked at his companion with some embarrassment and replied:

"Y-yes, you're right. . . . That actually happened. . . . Semen Nikolayevich . . . and Gavriilo. . . . Both together. . . ."

"Yes, I remember. . . ."

"He was a fine man for our city. . . . Educated, independent, with ideas. . . . He went to the university but never finished because of some escapade. . . . He once spoke of it as if he had made an unfortunate venture into love. 'My heart was broken,' he said. On the other hand I know that he corresponded with a friend in some outlandish place. That shows there was something behind it. . . . His father, he said, was a usurer, but not a malicious one. This caused a row between father and son. The young student didn't approve of it and wouldn't touch the money, but lived by teaching. . . . When the father died, Semen Nikolayevich came and inherited the property. He said to some one: 'I don't want it. . . . This is owed to society.' Then I don't know what happened. . . . The house, land, long-term leases, a lawsuit. . . . He carried it on one, two, three years,

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and then got to like it. Many still remember how he said: 'I'll finish the lawsuit with these curs and settle up. . . . I won't stay a day longer in this confounded hole.' . . . But it's the usual story. . . . We had a teacher once, a zoölogist, who came to our gymnasium and said bluntly: 'As soon as I write my dissertation, I'll get out of the swamp!' "

"That's Kallistov, isn't it?" asked the mathematician, with great interest. The narrator waved assent.

"He's still writing it. He married; had three children. . . . That's just the way with Semen Nikolayevich Budnikov. He's been making a dissertation of his life, so to speak. He began to enjoy this lawsuit. Challenges, protests, cassation, the whole game. . . . And he kept writing himself without consulting lawyers. . . . Then, after a while, he commenced to build a new house. When I got to know him, he was already a lucky, middle-aged bachelor, with a reddish face, and such a pleasant, quiet, substantial and sleepy voice. Then he had a few peculiarities. He sometimes used to come to see me, especially when it was time to pay my rent. . . . This was due on the twentieth. That meant that on the twentieth he used to come at eight o'clock in the evening and drink two cups

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of tea with rum in it. No more, no less! In each cup two spoonfuls of rum and one of sugar. I got to look at this as an addition to my rent. He did the same with all his lodgers,—only some with and some without rum. The rents were all different, about twenty in his four houses (one in the city was quite large). . . . That made forty cups of tea. . . . He seemed as if he had included that in his budget and marked it down. . . . Sometimes, 'I didn't find so and so at home, but he brought the money the next day. Still owing, two cups of tea.' "

"Really?" laughed Petr Petrovich. "He never reasoned that way! Why do you think so?"

"For this reason. At first this was an unexpected characteristic, but it got to be believed, although in your time maybe it didn't exist. The tenants began to say: you know M. Budnikov is an economical man. That was meant well and even as a sign of approval. But it suddenly reacted on Budnikov. . . . You understand? The unintelligible man began to develop a special intelligible trait. . . . It became clearer and clearer. All believed, for example, that M. Budnikov kept no servants. . Gavriilo was the porter of the house where I lived; he used to clean the clothes of the different people, fix the samovars, and run errands.

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Sometimes the master and servant used to sit side by side and clean shoes, the porter for the tenants, Budnikov for himself. Then M. Budnikov got a horse. No special need for him to do it. As a luxury, he'd ride twice a week to a farm near the city. The rest of the time the horse was free. Gavrilov wasn't busy all the time either. . . . The result was—the horse was put at Gavrilov's disposal, and he used to ride down town. Gavrilov had nothing against this arrangement, because he considered incessant work his special duty. You know there's a sort of talent for everything, and I thought once that Gavrilov was a kind of genius in the field of muscular labor. . . . Easy motioned,—unwearied freshness. Sometimes at night he wouldn't sleep. Look out of the window and you'd see Gavrilov sweeping the street or cleaning the ditches. It meant—he'd gone to bed and then remembered he hadn't swept all the pavement the last thing. So he'd go and clean it. And this was really beautiful."

"Yes," said the mathematician, "that's a good description of the man. I remember I liked to look at him,—he seemed rather attractive."

"Spiritual poise is always beautiful, and he did his duty without speculating about his relation to his master. . . . And that was a fine thing, you

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know,—their mutual relations. One used his muscles admirably. The other gave reason and rational meaning to it. . . . He saw that the time was not all filled . . . and he found a new occupation. . . . There was a sort of balancing of interests, almost an idyl. . . . Almost before dawn Gavrilov was at work. M. Budnikov also got up early. They said good morning with a manifestly pleasant feeling. Then M. Budnikov either went to work in his garden or went around his 'estate' scattered through the city. Poverty gets up early, and he went mornings to poverty's quarters. . . . Then he'd come back and say:

" 'Now harness up, Gavrilov, and I'll finish cleaning up. . . . The officials are just going to their offices. You may meet some one. . . . '

"At this time he considered himself neither a Tolstoyan nor a deliberate simplifier. . . . He often spoke of the abnormality of our lives, of the necessity of paying our debt to the laboring man, of the advantages of physical labor. 'See, I'm working,' he'd say to any one who caught him busied with axe or spade. 'I'm helping my neighbor, my porter, with his work.' It was hard to tell whether he was talking ironically or seriously. . . . At noon Gavrilov'd come back and put his horse in the stable, and M. Budnikov would go off on busi-

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ness and make polite remarks to his tenants about a broken fence or a piece of plaster knocked down by children's balls. . . . He often came back with one or two beggars. They had asked him for alms on the street and he'd offered 'assistance through toil.' . . . Of course, the rogues ran off shamefully, but M. Budnikov took especial pleasure in working, either alone or with Gavril. All the beggars in the city soon got to know him and bowed with a friendly smile, but did not ask for money. 'Why can't you see what's good for you, my friends?' he'd say meaningly. I must say that a 'life of toil' did bring him manifest personal benefits; his ruddy color was absolutely evident, even, and healthy. His face was always quiet and placid, and almost like Gavril's. . . . It had nothing malicious or strange in it."

"I see, you're back on your old theme!" said the mathematician, standing up and striking his companion's shoulder. "Of course, nothing terrible. . . . I'm going out here. . . . Eight minutes' wait."

The train slowed down and stopped.

III

Pavel Semenovitch, thus left without an audience, looked around in despair. Soon his gray eyes met

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mine. In his gaze I noticed an obstinate idea like that of a maniac. . . .

"You . . . understand?" he said frankly, wholly undisturbed by the fact that he was talking to a stranger.

"I think so," I answered.

"Good," he said, with evident satisfaction, and then he went on, as if he were talking to the same person.

"I had, you know, a school friend named Kalugin, Petr Petrovich. As a young man he was infected with the tendencies of his age, but he was a rare type. He said little. He preferred to listen, and he watched how others failed, and he tried, as is said, to turn the wheel of history. . . . But you could feel his rapture and his devotion in his silence. . . . He finally came to the conclusion: 'Everything is good and extraordinarily fine, but there is no lever. Money is the lever. And you can't do a thing without a hundred thousand.' You know, he succeeded in convincing several of his friends of this and they formed a small savings association. Of course, nothing came of it: one simply got tired; fate placed another too far from the source of gain. But Petr Petrovich held on and won. He wasn't brilliant, but he was of a good character, and that kind of

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men get along well in business. He first went into some sort of an institution along the Volga. It wasn't a bank nor a loan association. To get ahead, he didn't despise even this, and all of a sudden he put new life into it, as they say. In 'three years' time, he was making about six thousand a year. . . . He put the question this way: 'Five twenties make a hundred! I'll keep one thousand a year and put five thousand away for the cause. In twenty years my lever'll be ready.' More than that, he did it. Of course he had to have a self-sacrificing character. And system! First, to avoid all foolish accidents, he left his old friends 'for a time,'—those who tried to catch the wheel of history in their bare hands. 'I've got my problem. . . . Ingratitude . . . accidental notes . . . do me the favor, it's not necessary.' . . . And he held out. He mastered his life and counted every detail. Nothing—except making money! He got up every day, not like Budnikov at seven o'clock, but at thirteen minutes to seven. Second by second! He gave up his personal life. . . . Up to that time he had had only one pleasure: he got intimate with a girl, but on a free basis. They gave each other their word 'not to bind each other.' What a stupid phrase! A child gave its word to no one. . . . It just appeared and demanded its

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rights. . . . She was glad. . . . He was angry. This unpleasant event might be repeated, he thought, and, with an eye on his great cause, he determined to enjoy his freedom. 'I'll give the child a certain sum,' he said, 'even though it interferes with my great cause.' . . . The woman also had character. She never touched a cent of the money, but snatched up the child,—and away forever. . . . How he felt afterwards, no one knows, but he worked harder than ever to save money. . . . After various successes and failures, after twenty years, during which he regularly got up at thirteen minutes to seven, he congratulated himself on his success. He had a hundred thousand. He went to his work at the usual time, walked into the office of his superior and said: 'I'll leave in two months.' They opened their mouths in amazement. 'Are you crazy? Why? Can we raise your salary? Give you a share of the profits?' No! He told why, and in two months he went to Moscow to take up his old life. And he had a hundred thousand in his pocket."

"Oh, ho!" said Petr Petrovich, who just then came back from the restaurant. . . . "Still talking about Budnikov?"

"No," answered Pavel Semenovich. "I was talking about some one else."

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"Some one else! Go on, I don't care. . . . Go on with the hundred thousand. I hope that's not terrible. . . ."

His voice sounded as if it were mocking. Pavel Semenovitch looked at him in mild surprise and turned to me.

"Yes, it's like this. . . . He went to Moscow,—to his past, you see. . . . He thought life would wait, till he got rich. . . . He'd go to the same newspaper corner, find the same arguments and the same people, and they'd be grabbing at the wheel of history with their hands as ever. . . . He'd show his lever. . . . 'Permit me! You have fine ideas. . . . Here's my money to carry them out.' But there wasn't a soul to offer it to; there were other people in the corner, and they talked differently. The others had perished under the wheel of history, or had given up. . . . Life is like a train. . . . If you leave the station for a time, when you come back the train's gone. Sometimes you can't even find the station. You understand this tragedy, my friend?"

"But, excuse me," said Petr Petrovich. "A hundred thousand! Free! Many a man will be willing to have this tragedy. . . ."

"Yes? But this man, I tell you, was sincere."

"What of it?"

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"Just this. . . . He wandered around among his old and new friends and kept looking for the train. . . . He disgusted every one. . . . The thing for which he had given his own life and another's was unintelligible; it's just like losing a finger when you don't know what for. You understand,—various, respectable affairs like a 'people's home' or a paper or an 'ideal book store' don't satisfy a seventy-year-old man. . . . He's ready then to give up interest and capital. . . ."

"But at six per cent you can live modestly. . . . You can live!"

"Of course. . . . But if you want to do something. . . . This was an act of heroism. . . . He gave his life as others do theirs. . . . And not only his. . . . Would you do that for a little miserly interest? . . . And there was no reason for his heroism. . . . To sum up, one fine day they found him in a lonely room in a hotel with a bullet in his head. . . . And he had gotten rid of his money somehow, quickly and quietly. . . . I saw him the day before at a meeting of some society. No one noticed him especially. They greeted him and passed on; he was but a respectable man. Of a strong character and the best of intentions. But unusually dull!"

"H-m, yes!" said the mathematician. "There

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are such cranks." And he lay down to sleep. His face, with its fat, clipped mustache, again disappeared in the shadow, and you could see only his feet and his checkered trousers. "I think," he growled from his corner, "that Budnikov is more interesting. You're not through with him. . . ."

"Yes. . . . I . . . excuse me,—it was all due to chance. . . . I sat up all night recently. . . . I was reading Budnikov's correspondence with his 'distant' friend. Believe me, I could not tear myself away, and you never would think that it was written by that same Semen Nikolayevich Budnikov, who drank tea and rum in my rooms, sent Gavrilko downtown, and whose soul imperceptibly, but almost before my eyes, dried up and grew barren in our little house. . . . And it remained, so to speak, without reverence for anything."

IV

He stopped and looked at me bashfully and questioningly, as if he felt that he had said something which was not proper for a railroad conversation. He was somewhat startled when the mathematician exhaled a thick cloud of smoke from his dark corner and said:

"Pavel Semenovitch, I see you really are a

crank. Isn't that so? . . . Wonderful! . . . A man has a hundred thousand and shoots himself! Another lives as he likes, so to speak, healthy and ruddy. . . . A quiet soul. . . . Safe. . . . Is that strange? . . . By heavens, it's impossible. . . . Good night. . . . It's time to go to sleep. Nothing, nothing! . . . You won't disturb me by talking. . . . I won't listen. . . ."

He turned to the wall.

Pavel Semenovich modestly and questioningly looked at me with his naïve gray eyes, and began in a lower tone:

"There's a street in Tikhodol called Bolotnaya (Swamp Street). They built a house on it near me. . . . New and of fresh wood. . . . The first year it shone so, and then it lost its freshness. It got covered with that especial dirt and weathering and rubbish. Then it got the same color as the old stables and sheds and you couldn't tell it from them. Now they say it's haunted. . . . The people suddenly said that Budnikov had robbed a woman."

"That's absolute nonsense," called the mathematician. "I'll never believe that Budnikov was a robber. That's some stupid rumor."

Pavel Semenovich smiled sadly and rather distractedly:

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"That's what he was. A robber! . . . A robber is the word, . . . precisely! But it was just a little personal . . . tangle with rather vague outlines. . . . You see. . . . I must tell you that since your time a mother and daughter moved in. . . . The women were simple and very poor and M. Budnikov was their protector and friend. They ran in debt for a long time, and he—always so strict in affairs of this kind—stood it, and even gave them money. For the doctor or for better food, when one was sick. Finally the old woman died and Yelena became an orphan. M. Budnikov became very sympathetic, gave her a pleasant little home, and got her work; she sewed,—got along somehow. . . . Then she became a sort of housekeeper for M. Budnikov, and then,—people began to say that their relations became more intimate. . . ."

"Oh, oh!" yawned the mathematician. "They didn't need me for that. . . . Was she pretty?"

"Yes, rather pretty; fat, with flowing graceful movements and mild eyes. They said she was stupid. But, if she was, a woman's stupidity is often very peculiar. . . . A naïve and sleeping innocence of soul. She felt her situation very keenly. As is said in Uspensky, she was all shame. . . . M. Budnikov tried to teach her and lift her

up, so to speak, to his level. She seemed incapable of it. She sat usually with a book, spelled it out with her fingers, and her face was interested like a child's. She seemed to become dull and stupid when Budnikov was around. He got sick of her actions and then of Yelena, especially as other things took up his attention. But there was a time when he almost loved her. At least there were indications of it. In a word, the breach was not easy for him,—his conscience troubled him and he wanted to silence it. He finally decided to give her a ticket of the domestic lottery. . . . He called her, took out three tickets, put them on the table, placed his hand on them, and said:

“ ‘Look here, Yelena. One of these tickets may win you two hundred thousand. Do you understand?’ ”

“ ‘Of course she didn't understand well. She couldn't imagine so large a sum, but he went on:

“ ‘Now, I'll give you one. This paper is worth 365 rubles, but don't sell it. . . . Take it and may you be lucky. . . .’ ”

“ ‘She didn't take it, but huddled up, as if she were afraid. ‘All right,’ said M. Budnikov. ‘Give me your hand and take this paper.’ He took one of the tickets and guided her hand in making

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two pencil strokes sharply and heavily. His mind was clearly made up. . . . He gave it outright with all the results, we may say. 'You see,' he said, 'this is yours, and if you win two hundred thousand, they'll be yours too.' He placed it back on the table. She reached out her hand and put in her bosom a paper with the number of the ticket."

"Really?" asked the mathematician.

"Yes. . . . It had to happen so. . . . That machine was working in Petersburg, throwing out one number after another. . . . Children's hands pick them up. . . . And one of these tickets won."

"Two hundred thousand?" asked the mathematician, with great interest; apparently he had forgotten about sleeping.

"Not two hundred, but seventy-five. . . . During March, M. Budnikov looked at the list of drawings and saw that his number had won a large prize. Zero, again zero . . . 318 and 32. Suddenly he remembered that he had given one ticket to Yelena. . . . He also remembered that there were two lines on the first. He had three in a row: 317, 318 and 319. That means 317. . . . He got out the tickets and looked: there were two lines on 317. Yelena had won. . . ."

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"The devil," exclaimed the mathematician, raising himself a little. "That's luck!"

"Yes, it was. And she was so stupid. The lines were on that number, when he thought that he would give her another. . . . A mistake, a mechanical wave of the hand, mere chance. . . . And, because of this chance, Yelena, a stupid woman who understood nothing and did not know what to do with money, would take from him . . . him, M. Budnikov, take away, so to speak, a large sum of money. That was foolish, wasn't it? He was educated, had an aim in his life, or had had. . . . He might again. He would perhaps have used the money for some good cause. He would write again to his friend and ask his advice. . . . But she . . . she? A beast with a round form and beautiful eyes, which didn't even show clearly what was in them: the stupidity of a calf or the innocence of a youth who had not yet grown to conscious life. . . . Do you understand? . . . It was so natural. . . . Any one in Budnikov's place, you . . . I . . . even Petr Petrovich, would have felt the same way. . . ."

Petr Petrovich made some sort of an indistinct sound, which was susceptible of different interpretations.

"No?" said Pavel Semenovitch. "Excuse me.

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. . . I'm speaking about myself. . . . My thoughts or rather my inclinations would have been the same, perhaps in the subconscious realm. . . . Because . . . knowledge and all restraining influences are a sort of bark, a thin cover under which purely egoistic, primal and animal desires live and move. . . . If they find a weak spot. . . ."

"Fine, fine," laughed Petr Petrovich condescendingly, and I thought that he winked at me from his dark corner. "Let's get back to Budnikov. . . . What did he do? Pay it . . . and that's all."

"Apparently, yes; because he wanted to settle the question and was a little afraid, he called Yelena and congratulated her on winning. Then, apparently wishing to make use of a favorable opportunity, he hinted: 'When we separate, you'll be all right.' Then he got angry. . . ."

"What for?"

"I think, because she was such a fool. If she'd chosen then, she probably wouldn't have taken that number. But now it happened because of her folly. An orderly and wise man lost that money. That's what I imagine from Yelena's story. . . . 'He ran from one corner to another and found fault with me.' . . ."

"What of her? Glad, of course?"

"N-no. . . . She was frightened and began to weep. He got angry and she cried and he became still more angry."

"Really? What a fool!"

"Y-yes. . . . I've already explained: I don't call her wise, but weeping. . . . No, it wasn't foolishness. . . . When she told it to me afterwards . . . she got to this point, looked at me with her clear, bird-like eyes, and burst into tears. Even now I can't forget those eyes. . . . Foolishness, perhaps, but there's foolishness and foolishness. It wasn't clear knowledge and calculation about the situation. But in those blue eyes there was something very deep,—just as if a true instinct shone in them. . . . Those foolish tears, perhaps, were the only correct thing at that time. . . . I dare to say,—the wisest thing in the whole confused story. . . . Somewhere, not far off, was hidden the solution, like a secret door. . . ."

"Fine, fine. . . . Go on!"

"Next, . . . M. Budnikov looked a long time intently at the foolish woman. Then he sat down beside her, put his arms around her, and, for the first time after the perceptible cooling of their relations, he asked her not to go to her rooms, but to spend the night with him. . . .

"So things went on for some time. Yelena

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bloomed. . . . Her love was 'foolish'; it was very direct. At first,—she told me herself,—M. Budnikov was repugnant to her. Later, after he had taken her, he dried her up, as she said. Such direct feminine natures do not separate feelings and facts, so to speak. Wherever you touch it, the whole complex reacts together. . . . He came back to her; therefore, he loved her. . . . For two weeks she was so joyful and beautiful that every one looked at her,—glad of her limitless joy. . . . But in two weeks M. Budnikov again cooled off. . . . A cold storm was raging in our yard. . . . Yelena's eyes showed that she had been weeping. . . . The neighbors grumbled and pitied. M. Budnikov was sullen. . . . Those two lines had sunk deep into the hearts of both and a third felt them. . . . The porter Gavril. . . ."

"H-m! The whole story!" said Petr Petrovich, again getting up and sitting down beside Pavel Semenovich. "Was he there? Did he learn she'd won?"

"He knew nothing about it. I've spoken of him. A less clever person you could hardly imagine,—absolutely heavenly directness. . . . Sometimes he didn't seem to be a man, but . . . what shall I say? . . . a simple collection of muscles, partially conscious of their existence. He was constructed

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properly, harmoniously, rightly, and always in motion. And, in addition, two good human eyes looked at the whole world from the point of view of physical and moral indifference, so to speak. . . . Sometimes these eyes really gleamed with curiosity and such unconscious excellence that you actually felt jealous. Sometimes it seemed to me that if it wasn't Gavrilov himself, there was something in him which understood M. Budinov, Yelena, and me. . . . He understood and smiled at us, just because he did understand. . . . Suddenly the man became confused. . . . It began when Budnikov made up with Yelena and dropped her again. . . . To him she was an abandoned 'master's lady,' a creature which inspired in him no special respect, and very probably his first advances seemed rather simple and rustic. She met these advances with deep hostility and anger. Then Gavrilov 'began to think,' that is, began to eat little, become slack in his work, grow thin, and generally to dry up.

"This lasted during the fall and winter. Budnikov finally grew cold to Yelena; she felt insulted and believed that he was 'laughing' at her. . . . Gavrilov's character was rather spoiled and the old harmony between him and Budnikov disappeared. . . . And the ticket with the two lines on it lay

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in the table drawer and seemed forgotten by every one. . . .

“Spring came with everything in this condition. . . . For a while I lost sight of the little drama which was being enacted before my eyes. . . . My examinations were coming on; I was very tired and could not sleep. If you do fall asleep, you awake with a start and can’t get to sleep again. You light a candle,—your books are on the table,—you begin to study. . . . And it’s sunrise. . . . You go out on the steps, look at the sleeping street, the trees in the garden. . . . A sleepy coachman is going along the street; the trees are rustling faintly, as if they were shivering in the morning chill. . . . You envy the coachman, and even the trees. . . . You want rest and this concentrated unconscious life. . . . Then you go out in the garden. . . . Sit down on a bench and just get to sleep, when the sun shines in your eyes. There was just such a bench in a quiet corner by the stable wall. When the sunlight fell on it at seven o’clock you’d wake up, drink your tea, and go to your classes.

“I went out one day at dawn and fell asleep on this bench. Suddenly I woke up as if some one had called me. The sun had scarcely risen very high and the bench was still in the shadow.

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What's the matter, I wondered. . . . What woke me up? Suddenly I heard Yelena's voice in Gavrilov's stable. I wanted to get up and leave. . . . I don't like to be an eavesdropper and it was rather unpleasant to hear the simple solution of Yelena's drama. But, while I was getting ready to leave, the conversation continued and finally I didn't go. . . . I just listened.

"'You see I've come,' said Yelena. . . . 'What do you want?'

"'Suddenly, with such a deep and simple grief, she added:

"'You've been torturing me. . . .'

"'She said this . . . with such a sincere and heartfelt groan. Before, yes, and after, she always spoke formally to him, but that time . . . a woman's heart, sick with shame and love, used the form of affection,—frankly, unconditionally, freely. . . .

"'You've tortured me, too, Yelena Petrovna,' answered Gavrilov. 'I've lost my strength. I've dried up. I can't work and I can't eat. . . .'

"'What are you going to do now?' asked Yelena.

"'What?' he said. 'Marry you, of course.'

"'For a few minutes neither spoke. Yelena seemed to be weeping softly. And yet that silence was wonderfully clear, simple, frank. 'You see

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the situation: you're no match for me; I would have worked for Budnikov as well as I could, gone to the village, gotten a place, married and taken some good girl. . . . But that's past; willy nilly I want you as you are. . . .'

" 'I'm lost,' said Yelena softly.

" 'Why, Yelena Petrovna,' answered Gavriilo, with a grim tenderness. . . . 'I don't see that you're lost. . . . It's just the same. . . . I can't live. . . . Like a corpse. . . . I can't eat. . . . I've got no strength. . . .'

" 'Yelena wept more loudly. . . . She was having a good cry. It seemed painful but healing. Gavriilo said sternly:

" 'Come, what are you going to do? . . . Are you coming?'

" 'Yelena apparently exerted herself, stopped weeping, and answered the repeated question:

" 'Do you fear God, Gavriilo Stepanich?'

" 'Why?' asked Gavriilo.

" 'You won't find fault with me?'

" 'No,' he said, 'I won't find fault with you. And I won't let any one else. If you're serious in throwing this overboard forever. . . . Forever. . . . I'll trust you. . . .'

" 'Silence. I didn't hear Yelena's answer. I only imagined that she must have turned to the

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east, and perhaps there was an ikon in the room. . . . She crossed herself. . . . Then she suddenly took his head in her arms and I heard them kiss. That same instant Yelena ran out, rushed almost to the house, but she suddenly stopped, opened the gate, and came into the garden.

“Then she caught sight of me. . . . But it didn’t embarrass her. She walked up, stopped, and looked at me out of her happy eyes, and said:

“‘Do you always take a walk mornings? . . . Friend . . .’

“Suddenly, overcome by her emotions, she came nearer, took hold of my shoulders, shook me unceremoniously, looked into my eyes, and laughed. . . . It was so naïve. She felt that I had been listening and saw nothing bad in it. . . . When Gavriilo came out with his broom and also entered the garden, she blushed and ran past him. Gavriilo looked after her with quiet joy, and then his gaze fell on me. He bowed with his habitual quiet politeness and commenced to sweep the path. He again showed that same beautiful and effortless play of healthy, free muscles. . . . And I remember how the monastery bell sounded for early matins,—it was Sunday. Gavriilo stopped in a broad bay of the alley, took off his cap, held the broom in his left hand, and crossed himself with

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his right. The whole seemed to me so extraordinarily bright and beautiful. The man stood in the centre of a world of light, where everything was very good, that is, all his relations to earth and heaven. . . . In a word, it was so soothing a sight that I went to my room and fell fast asleep after so many sleepless nights. There's something healing and calming in honest human happiness. You know it sometimes occurs to me that we are all bound to be well and happy, because . . . you see . . . happiness is the highest possible condition of spiritual health. And health is contagious like disease. . . . We are so to speak open on all sides: to the sun, wind, and other things. Others enter us, and we them, without noticing it. . . . And that's why——"

Pavel Semenovich suddenly stopped as he felt the fixed and cynical gaze of Petr Petrovich.

"Yes, yes! . . . Excuse me," he said, "this is really a little unclear. . . ."

"It is a little. You'd better go on. Without philosophy. . . ."

"... M. Budnikov woke me up. It happened to be the twentieth. He came as usual, and as usual he drank two cups of tea with rum, but I saw that M. Budnikov was out of humor, and even

nervous. . . . And I involuntarily connected it with the incident of the morning.

"For some time he kept out of sorts and every one around noticed that something secret and hidden had gone wrong between master and servant. Gavrilo wanted to leave. . . . Budnikov would not let him go, although he often told me that he was disappointed in Gavrilo. As I was walking one day through the garden, I saw them both standing by the gate and talking. Budnikov was excited; Gavrilo, calm. He was standing in an easy position and kept looking at his spade, which was stuck in the ground. He was evidently insisting on something which enraged Budnikov. . . . But I thought that the subject of conversation created between them a strange equality. . . .

"'Yes, friend, of course, it's your business,' said M. Budnikov. He caught sight of me but did not think it necessary to change the subject. He spoke spitefully and angrily. . . . 'Yes. . . . You're a free man. . . . But just remember, Gavrilo Stepanich, if you have any utilitarian object, . . . I, of course, can give only a very small sum. . . .'

"M. Budnikov was unable to speak simply, and used foreign words, even when talking to Gavrilo.

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. . . Gavriilo looked at him calmly and answered:

“‘We don’t want anything. . . . We have enough. . . .’

“M. Budnikov glanced cautiously at him and answered:

“‘Fine! Remember! Afterwards. . . . I’ll go to Petersburg on business. . . . Do what you want to.’

“Gavriilo bowed and said:

“‘I thank you. . . .’

“‘Excuse me,’ replied M. Budnikov, with a shadow of ironical melancholy, ‘I don’t expect gratitude.’

“He slammed the gate and left the garden.

“He stopped and waited for me in the yard, took my arm, and came up to my rooms. On the way, and in my apartments, he kept talking confusedly and incoherently. He did not conceal the fact that he had had some affection for a certain woman. This might be still ‘alive under the ashes.’ . . . On the other hand he was dreaming of union and the possibility of friendship with his humblest brother. Although both of these feelings had led to his disillusionment, he could show something, so that every one would feel it. . . . But, in general, magnanimity and the finer feelings belong only to highly cultured people. . . .

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"He was nervous and under his rather artificial pathos, I could see his real exasperation and anger.

"I later had a chance to see his diary. These were separate pages, written like letters to his distant friend. . . . Apparently he hadn't sent any letters for a long time, but these pages were like lights in the darkness. Under the approximate day of the conversation with Gavrilo was a passionate note. He told the whole story of Yelena, and wrote that he had made a mistake, and that he now loved her. . . . And that he would try once more. . . . This ended with a sudden burst of poetry: 'My distant friend, you, of course, do not doubt that I will do what I consider the duty of magnanimity. . . .'

"Then, sending Gavrilo one day with the horse somewhere outside the city, M. Budnikov went to the wing where Yelena still lived.

"'Yelena! You should come to me. You must fix up something. . . .'

"A few days before this he had been thoughtful and solemn, but now he dressed in style, went to the wing, and entered Yelena's room, without heeding the inquisitive looks of his tenants.

"No one knew what happened in that room, but a half-hour later M. Budnikov came out, stubborn,

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affected, but apparently dazed. Every one began to say that he had formally proposed to Yelena and—she had rejected him.

“After this he left for Petersburg, where he had a lawsuit before the Senate. He lost it, and when he returned, Gavrilov and Yelena were already married.

V

“This made a great impression upon him, like some great spiritual conversion. One apparently insignificant circumstance especially surprised him. Every spring flowers grew by the wall under M. Budnikov’s windows. This Yelena did regularly, and it was put down as an annual source of expense: seed, a watering pot, to a blacksmith for mending the spade. . . . In the early spring Yelena used to set to work at it, gladly and merrily, and M. Budnikov took a delighted interest in it. Now that wing was neglected, the flower bed languished, M. Budnikov’s windows seemed blind. . . . But the other wing, where Gavrilov and his wife lived, bloomed and flourished. A symbol. When M. Budnikov came back from the station and took one look at this unexpected contrast his face changed, and for a short time he lost his usual aristocratic

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air. I suddenly felt sorry for him. I went out and invited him into my room. He sat with me a long time and gave me his impressions of the capital,—verbose, rambling, insincere. I kept feeling that M. Budnikov's soul was thinking of something very far removed from his impressions of the capital.

“Gradually everything drifted back into the old channels. M. Budnikov still went twice a week to his farm, still visited his tenants on certain days, still prepared his dinner on an oil stove. But there were more trifles in his diary; for example, he began to note down how many steps he took each day, and apparently counted thereby the use and value of various things.

“In a short time another change took place: M. Budnikov felt attracted to religion.

“I remember one fall evening. . . . It was one of those evenings when nature touches your soul especially. The stars seem to be waving and whispering in the heavens, and the earth is covered with light and shade. . . . Our little city, as you know, is quiet and filled with foliage. You go out in the evening and sit down on your steps. And so with the other houses along the street; here's one person on a bench by the gate, another on the dirt bank, another on the grass. . . . People are

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whispering about themselves, the trees about themselves,—and there's a hardly perceptible hum. Yes, and something's whispering in your soul. You unconsciously review your whole life. What was and what is left, where you came from, what's going to happen? Then, everything . . . the meaning of your life in the general economy of nature, so to speak, . . . nature, where all the stars sink, unnumbered, unlimited, . . . they gleam and shine. . . . And speak to your soul. Sometimes it's sad and deep and quiet. . . . You feel you're going to the wrong place. You begin to think what's there above. . . . You want to run away from this reproving beauty, this exalted calm, with your load of confusion, and you want to melt away in it. . . . You've no place to go. . . . You enter your office, look at all your things in the lamp-light . . . text-books, copy-books with answers written by your pupils. . . . And you ask: where's there anything alive? . . ."

Petr Petrovich muttered something and the narrator stopped again.

"Well . . . that was the way I felt and I was sitting on my steps and thinking: here's the people coming from vespers. . . . What of it? That's the way they find their relations to the infinite. . . . Or else it's nothing but habit, mere automatic mo-

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tion. I prefer it to be real. Suddenly I saw one man leave the crowd and come towards me. It turned out to be M. Budnikov. He had been to vespers. He sat down beside me.

"I felt that M. Budnikov was waiting, you know, for me to ask him why he went to church. He never had gone and was always sarcastic about religion, but now he had suddenly commenced to go. I was really interested and the evening led me to be frank. . . . Why not say, I thought, that there's a cloud on my soul. . . .

"Yes, Semen Nikolayevich, . . ." I said . . . "I look at the sky and think. . . .

"He nodded and commenced:

"That tortured me, too . . . and I suffered. . . . And like you, I saw no solution. But the solution is so plain. . . .'

"He pointed toward the church, a white spot showing through the trees.

"'We, intelligent people,'" he said, "'are frightened, so to speak, by the beaten path, banality. But,—we must drop our pride and fuse . . . or as Tolstoy once said,—partake of the common cup, search with the humble faith of humanity . . . cease examining the foundations of life. . . . Like Antaeus, so to speak, we must touch our common mother. . . .'

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“He spoke rather nicely. His voice was so sleepy and murmured like the bass in the episcopal choir. I’ll tell you the truth: I felt envious. . . . Really you could feel the quiet and blessing. . . . As M. Budnikov said, it was worth while to fuse, and all these searchings of the heart are healed as by the holy oil. Suddenly I found the lost meaning. I asked myself: what’s the use of these books? Why all these notes, all this quiet life? . . . Why is this bootmaker solemn and satisfied? Mikhailo looks for no special meaning, but he floats along with the general current of life, that is, he agrees with its general significance and meaning. People go maybe once a week into this little white building which looks out so attractive through the trees; they spend a little time in communion with some mystery—and see, for a week they are supplied with the idea of meaning. . . . And many live a harder life than I do. . . .

“There’s M. Budnikov. . . . Had he really found *this* for himself and solved his troubles? I almost asked, but our priest went by just then. M. Budnikov bowed and he returned it pleasantly. And he looked at me with questioning kindness. . . . Budnikov has been converted and may bring back another wanderer. I answered the bow rather warmly and gratefully, and again felt like asking

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M. Budnikov, but another person of an entirely different character put in an appearance. . . .”

VI

Pavel Semenovitch thought for a moment and then asked Petr Petrovich:

“Did Rogov ever study with you?”

“Rogov. . . . I don’t remember. . . . I’ve had so many. . . .”

“He was remarkable and our council often discussed him. . . . His fate was peculiar. . . . You see, the boy’s father was a rascal of the old school, a slanderer, drunkard and a quarrelsome fellow, and as much bothered by modern times as a wolf is by hunters. He came too late. Rough manners unfitted for the present times. He spent his last days in trouble, poverty, and drunkenness. He always thought that fate did not treat him fairly; people got along well, but he, as he thought,—a model of activity,—was dirty, hungry and oppressed. . . . And imagine,—this man had a family. . . . a wife and son. . . .

“The wife was irresponsible; her whole being had been crushed in the full sense of the word, except one corner of her soul. When anything concerned her son, a door seemed to open into her com-

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pletely stupefied soul, which was like a citadel uncaptured in the midst of a fallen city, and so much wifely heroism came out through this gate that at times the old ruffian and drunkard put his tail between his legs. God knows what this cost her, but she succeeded just the same in giving her son an education. When I went to teach in Tikhodol, I found this fellow in the last class. He was a bashful, apparently modest boy and behaved quietly; but his eyes had such an expression, strange, restrained; I confess it made you uneasy: a curious fire, like the flame of a restless, internal conflagration. His thin, drawn face was always pale and a crop of brown hair fell over his rough forehead. He learned easily, made few friends among his schoolmates, seemed to hate his father and loved his mother almost abnormally.

“Now . . . excuse me. . . . I must say a few words about myself. Otherwise you won't understand a lot of what's coming. . . . I'd only been teaching a very few years and had the usual idea. . . . I looked at my calling as noble, so to speak, from the ideal point of view. My companions seemed a holy regiment, yes . . . the gymnasium almost a temple. . . . You know, young people feel that way and value it highly. . . . You run to this light with every trouble and every ques-

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tion. . . . It's the living soul of our business. . . . What shall I say, when he comes to you, a fellow with his young soul under his uniform with all its buttons sewed on. . . . I, the teacher, need him with his questions and errors. . . . And he needs me to search and study. . . . Honestly you want to guide them. . . ."

The narrator paused and continued in a low voice:

"That's the way it was with me. . . . I got intimate with several boys from my classes, among them Rogov. . . . Gave them books, and they visited me. You understand, over a samovar, simply, heart to heart. I remember this as the finest time of my life. . . . Every time you open a new journal, you find conversation, discussion, argument. I listened, without interfering at first, to the way they wandered and argued, and then I explained,—carefully but pleasantly. You see, you get one thought and then another, and again it comes so sharp that it scratches you. . . . And you feel how you need to restrain yourself and think and study. And you grow with them. . . . And live. . . .

"It didn't last long. One day my director called me in for a confidential conversation. . . . Well, you know the rest. . . . This 'extracurricular' influence of the leaders of youth does not enjoy pro-

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tection. Journals already! . . . The director, you know him,—Nikolay Platonovich Popov,—is a fastidious man. . . . He merely hinted and afterwards acted as if he really knew nothing. . . . I almost got angry; at first I even refused to obey, and appealed to the highest understanding of my obligations. Then . . . I saw that it was no use. The main point was that I wasn't the only one getting talked about: the boys were getting a bad reputation. . . . That was hard and difficult enough but what could I say to my young disputants? How could I explain it? I obeyed the evidently senseless and humiliating order! This was the first blow that life had dealt me and I did not notice at the time that I had received a mortal wound.

"I obeyed and stopped my evening discussions. I can conscientiously say that I thought even more about them. But youths, you know, don't obey so easily and can't understand the whole meaning. One evening this Rogov came to me with a companion. Secretly. Flushed faces, blazing eyes, and a peculiar look. . . . I stopped this kind of fellowship. 'No,' I said, 'gentlemen, we'd better stop it.' I saw that both boys were getting worked up. Rogov began to say something, but he had a convulsion of the throat and his eyes suddenly took on an evil expression. . . . I found a way to justify

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myself: I was afraid for them, especially for Rogov and his mother. . . . You see, if our conspiracies were discovered, his whole career—and his mother's heroism—would have gone for nothing. So I yielded . . . for the first time. . . .

“In place of this I tried to make my lessons as interesting as possible. My evenings were free. . . . It was boring. I'd begun to get accustomed to my young circle. And now—nothing. I went for my books. Worked like a dog and kept thinking: this must be interesting to them; it will be new and it answers such and such questions. . . . I read and dug in my books, collected everything interesting, attractive, that pushed apart the official walls and the official lessons. . . . I kept thinking of those conversations. . . . And I thought I was getting results. . . . I remember the whole class almost died from zeal. . . . Suddenly the director began to attend the lessons. He'd come in, sit down, and listen without saying a word. . . . You know what happened next. You act as if it were nothing, but both you and the class feel it's not a lesson but a sort of investigation. . . . Again delicate questions on the side: ‘Really, excuse me, but where did you get this? Out of what official text book? How do you think this agrees with the courses of study?’

“I'll be brief. . . . In a word, the enthusiasm

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finally died out of me. . . . The class became merely a class: the living people began to retire further and further; they disappeared in a sort of fog. . . . I lost intellectual contact. Remarks . . . plan . . . the enumeration of the stylistic beauties of a live work. In this there are twelve beauties. First . . . second . . . and so on. . . . It fitted the program. . . . That is, you understand, I didn't notice how I dried up just like Budnikov.

"Anyway this young fellow finished his course and went to the capital. . . . He didn't get into the university right away. It was the time of secret denunciations. . . . Perhaps my lectures were suspicious. To sum up,—he lost a year. He wrote his mother that he had entered and had a fellowship, but he really beat his way along, was poor and probably got disgusted. Then he began to tramp. Suddenly he had a great sorrow: his mother died before he could get home. As soon as her son left home, she began to waste away. . . . The guiding star of her life, so to speak, disappeared from the horizon—and she lost the power of resistance. Died of consumption, you know, quickly, almost gladly. 'Vanya doesn't need me any more,' she'd say. 'I got him on the right track, thank God. He'll get along now.' She said the Nunc Dimittis and died. Soon after they found

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the honored father in a ditch. And my Rogov was an orphan. . . .

“The old woman was really in too much of a hurry; her son really needed her more than ever. He learned well and eagerly, so to speak, without wasting his time, as if he were hurrying somewhere. When he heard of his mother’s death, something broke in his soul. . . . In turn she seemed to have been the only ideal in his life. ‘I’ll finish, get on my feet, revive my shattered truth: even though she’s ready to die, mother’ll know that there is divine blessing, love, and gratitude. . . . For a year, a month, even a week. . . . An instant even, for her heart to be filled and melted with joy.’ Suddenly, in place of everything, the grave. . . . A crash . . . and it’s all over! There’s no need of gratitude, nothing to go back to, to correct. . . . You’ve got to have strength to stand such a temptation without being shattered. . . . You need faith in the general meaning of life. . . . It mustn’t seem to you but blind chance. . . .

“He didn’t hold on. He had no support. . . . He changed, got rough, and began to drink in with his wine a poisonous feeling of insult and of the injustice of fate. . . . So it went. He threw up his examinations—what was the use of getting a diploma? He drifted along like an empty boat

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on a river. . . . He came back to our city. . . . Perhaps he wanted to tie up by his mother's grave. . . . But how could that help him? . . . If he'd tried to find some meaning, that would have been another thing. . . . And so . . . he got in court a certificate, 'to travel' on business, and followed his father's footsteps. He lived a dissolute life, spent his time in saloons, with worthless people, and engaged in business of the most shady character. One year of this life,—and he'd become a drunken, impudent bum, the enfant terrible of our peaceful city, a menace to the citizens. The devil knows how, but the bashful boy became insolent and diabolically clever: every one in the city was afraid of him. . . . It's strange, but there isn't a city in Russia without its Rogov. A sort of a state character. It was quiet everywhere, peaceful slumber, idyllic calm, M. Budnikov walking along the streets, obstinate, conceited, counting his steps. . . . Evenings, especially on holidays, these poetic murmurs, and there's a lot of noise from some saloon like our 'On the Crag,' and some misshapen, sick and desperate soul carousing. . . . Satellites around, of course. This is a natural and necessary detail to fill up the provincial corners, so to speak. . . .

"Rogov met me soon after he turned up. . . . He

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bowed shyly and went to one side, especially when he was drunk. One time I met him, spoke to him, and asked him in. . . . He came . . . sober, serious, even bashful . . . from old habit, of course. . . . But we didn't stick together. Memories parted us: I was a young teacher with a lively faith in my calling, with lively feelings and words: He was a young man, still pure and respecting my moral authority. . . . Now he was Vanka Rogov, a Tikhodol bum, engaged in shady business. . . . And I. . . . In a word, we seemed to be parted by a solid wall: the main reason of all I won't mention. I felt that I had to shatter the barrier, tell him something that would reach his soul and control it as I used to. . . . He seemed to be waiting for this in terror: waiting for the cruel blow. . . . His eyes showed his pain and expectation. . . . I didn't have the strength. It was gone, . . . lost probably when for the first time we parted in shame. . . .

"I had to watch like a sympathetic witness, so to speak, how this young fellow degraded himself, grew fast, drank, and defiled himself. . . . He got insolent, lost all sense of shame. Then I heard that Rogov was an extortioner and begging. Business was poor; he was on the border between the merely offensive and the criminal. He was as clever

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as an acrobat and laughed at everything. In two or three years he was absolutely transformed. He had become a menacing, dirty, and very unpleasant figure.

"Sometimes he'd come when he was drunk. . . . It's strange: but I seemed to feel more at home when he was that way. . . . It simplified matters, his fault was evident, and it was easier to draw a moral. I remember after one of his descents into the loathesome, I said to him:

" 'This and that's not right, Rogov.'

"He shrugged his shoulders, turned away his eyes, as if he was afraid of a moral beating; then he shook his hair, looked me straight in the eye, obviously relying on his impudence:

" 'What's wrong, Pavel Semenovich?'

" 'It's disgraceful,' I said.

" 'You know,' he said, 'I've changed one quarrelsome goal for another not less quarrelsome. That was wrong and now it's disgraceful. My theory works out all right for me,' he said. 'Honor and everything like that is nothing but dessert. You know it comes after dinner. If there's no dinner, what's the use of dessert? . . .'

" 'But, remember, Rogov,' I said, 'why you have no dinner. . . . You studied well, had a good start, and then suddenly went wrong. . . .'

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"That moment I thought my statement was not only convincing but incontrovertible. . . . And he looked at me, laughed, and said:

" 'You've sometimes played billiards a little, haven't you?'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'I play for relaxation. . . .'

" 'You know the downward stroke?'

" 'Yes.' You know that's a peculiar and paradoxical shot. The ball first goes forward and then it suddenly and apparently of its own accord rolls back. . . . At first sight it seems incomprehensible and a violation of the laws of motion, but it's really simple.

" 'Well, what do you think?' he asked. 'Has the ball a will of its own? No. . . . It's merely a contest between two different motions. . . . One rules in the beginning, the other later. . . . Now you see,' he said, 'all her life my mother went straight but father, as you know, spun around like a top. That's why I went straight at first, as long as my mother's impulse lasted. . . . I hadn't gotten my bearings, when I swung round to father's pattern. . . . There's my whole story. . . .'

"He spoke frankly and hopelessly. He dropped his head, shook his hair down over his face, and then, when he looked at me again, I felt uneasy. His eyes showed his pain. Did you ever see a sick

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animal? . . . A dog,—usually an affectionate brute, is willing then to bite its master.

“‘Now,’ he said, ‘whom do you think’s to blame?’

“‘I don’t know, Rogov. I’m not your judge. . . . It’s not a question of blame. . . .’

“‘Not of blame, what then? I think he’s to blame who started me off with that shot. . . . That means to condemn no one. I’m a case of downward stroke in life. . . . I do the will of Him that sent me. . . . So there you are, my dear Pavel Semenovich. . . . Have you got two grivens of silver? I want to drown my sorrow. . . .’

“‘This was the first time that he had asked me for two grivens and I instantly felt that the old barrier between us had been broken. Now he could insult me as he would any one else.

“‘I wanted to defend myself.

“‘No, Rogov. I won’t give you two grivens. Come any time you feel like. . . . I’m glad to see you. . . . But this is impossible. . . .’

“‘He dropped his shaggy head, sat down, and said dully:

“‘Yes, Pavel Semenovich. Excuse me. I’ll come without begging. Yet to sit down with you, I feel easier and free from my usual load.’

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"He sat still. A long, strained silence ensued. Then he said:

" 'There was a time . . . when I hoped to receive something from you. . . . You don't know what you meant to me. Even now I sometimes feel I must see you. You're waiting for something. . . . No. . . . It's hopeless. . . . A downward stroke and it's all over. . . . '

" 'Excuse me, Rogov,' I said. 'You're really misusing that example from billiards. You're not an ivory ball but a living man.'

" 'And for that reason, I feel. . . . As for a ball,—wherever you send it,—into a pocket or a hole, that ivory ball doesn't care. . . . But a man, most esteemed Pavel Semenovitch, finds it hard to be pocketed. . . . Do you think that any one willingly and voluntarily refuses dessert? . . . I wouldn't. . . . I'm a man with reflexes, as they say. I see and examine my trajectory clear to the end. . . . I'll become a pig of pigs and I can't reform. At times I think . . . perhaps . . . somehow . . . somewhere . . . there may be some . . . point of support. . . . Sometimes you get irritated . . . really. . . . Where is truth . . . reality? . . . Is there such a thing, Pavel Semenovitch?'

" 'Of course there is,' I answered.

" 'How sincerely you spoke. There must be, of

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course . . . there is. . . . But where? Excuse me, I don't want to catch you. . . . You don't know yourself. You looked once and stopped. That's why I'll only ask you for two grivens. Sometimes I may be sitting by a fire. . . . You're a man with a soul. . . . Another time, perhaps, I'll be able to get more out of you. . . .'

" 'Listen here,' I said to him. 'Think now, can I really help you in any way?' I felt that there was something to him. . . . He was rather touched, was not insolent. . . . He became thoughtful and dropped his head.

" 'No,' he replied, 'it can't be done. You're not to blame, friend. Because . . . I, and every one like me, is very greedy. Like swine we wallow in the mire, and we want any one who helps us to be whiter than snow. . . . You need a lot of strength, friend. You haven't enough. . . . A storm is necessary. . . . To breathe fire. . . . There are miracles. . . . But you. . . . You're not angry at me? . . .'

" 'Angry? Why?'

"We both stopped talking. I had nothing to say to him, he began again to walk around, but he gradually recovered his former manner. He came and sat down and he showed his brandy. The next Saturday he came in the same condition and

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sat down beside me on the steps. Just then the bell rang for vespers. In a short time M. Budnikov came out of the gate. Dandy, you know how he is, stubborn as ever, perfectly self-satisfied. . . . He breathes forth the consciousness of duty well done.

"I remember what an unpleasant effect he produced upon me. Rogov's face suddenly changed. He jumped up, adopted a theatrical pose, took off his cap, and said:

" 'To M. Budnikov, Semen Nikolayevich, on his way to vespers is extended the most respectful greeting of Vanka Rogov.

"Then with a sweeping wave of his cap, he began to sing—from a well-known romance:

" 'I can n-no l-longer pay at all. . . .

Remem-mber me, m-my friend beloved. . . .'

"This buffoonery was too much. . . . I felt that I disliked Budnikov, but yet. . . . He was insulting a man on a point which from every angle and in any case should have won his respect. Yelena soon came out of the gate and also started for church. He sang to me:

" 'Ophelia! Nymph! Remember me

In those most sacred prayers of thine.'

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"This made me really angry. Yelena quailed before the impudent stare and insolent, even if unintelligible words. She dropped her head and quickly walked to church.

"'Listen, Rogov,' I said. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself! I must tell you . . . if you want to come here, I humbly beg you to act more decently. . . .'

"He turned and I saw in his eyes a peculiar expression—of evil pain. He felt like biting me. . . .

"I tried to soften the bitterness of my words and said:

"'Rogov, you don't know these people, nor their relations, and yet you venture to insult them. . . .'

"He smiled at me and replied:

"'You're thinking of the idyl? The kindly M. Budnikov made two hearts happy. Why, here's Gavryushenka.'

"In truth, Gavrilov had just come out of the gate. Rogov beckoned to him rather hostilely. . . .

"'I congratulate you, Gavryushenka, . . . on your master's leavings. . . . Wise fellow! You knew where the crabs winter. . . . In case of necessity, you may depend upon my legal knowledge. . . .'

"Surprising how these cynics find things out. Evidently Rogov knew the whole story and suspected Gavrilov of having mercenary motives. . . .

"He walked up and patted him on the shoulder. . . . Gavriilo got angry and pushed Rogov away violently. Rogov almost fell down, laughed, and, with pretended indifference, started along the path. He came up to me, stopped and said:

" 'Most esteemed Pavel Semenovitch. . . . I want to ask you a question: haven't you read . . . it's in Xenophon . . . the conversation between Alcibiades and Pericles? . . . If you haven't, I recommend it most highly. Although it's in a dead language, it's instructive.'

"He went off singing an indecent song. A little while after I hunted up this dialogue. I wondered what he meant. . . .

"You know it's a hard but a powerful piece. The subject's about like this: Young Alcibiades went one day to Pericles. . . . Remember, Pericles was already a famous man and enjoyed the confidence of every one . . . because of past services and a certain air of benevolence. . . . Anyway his position was secure. Alcibiades was a rascal, worthless, drunkard, in all sorts of scandals with Athenian girls, cut off dogs' tails, as you know. . . . A man of no reputation for well-doing. Well, one day, this rogue of a young fellow went up to Pericles and said: 'Listen, Pericles, you're a man chock full of benefactions clear to the top of your

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head, you may say. I'm wandering off the road and twisting up everything, for I have nothing to do. Every one's angry at me. I want you to explain everything to me.' Pericles, of course, was willing and thought it was a good idea to talk to the young man. He might bring him to his senses. So he said: 'Go ahead and ask what you want.' Then came the question: 'What is doing well? How do you learn it?' Pericles, of course, laughed: 'Honor the gods, obey the laws, and do your duty. To obey the laws is the first duty of a citizen and a man.' 'Fine,' answered the young fellow. 'Tell me, please, which laws am I to obey: the bad or the good ones?' Pericles was almost insulted. 'If a law's a law, it's good. What are you talking about?' 'No,' said Alcibiades, 'wait and don't get angry.' . . . You know at this time in Athens all these principles were mixed up . . . parties, struggle, some robbing others, ostracism, a sort of banishment by administrative order . . . usurpers . . . favorites . . . there really was confusion,—a man jumped forward and drew up his own laws for his own advantage or for his relatives and friends. Then old gods were all mixed up, the oracles answered anything, provided it didn't apply to the subject. In a word, everything that was clear in life had become unclear: there was no equilibrium,

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no generally acknowledged truth. . . . A new system was necessary. Clouds covered the sky and there were no stars to steer by. . . . That was why Alcibiades asked what laws should be obeyed; those which prescribe good or bad. Of course, Pericles answered the good. 'How can I tell which are good? What is the mark, so to speak?' 'Obey all! That's what laws are for! . . . ' 'That means laws passed by the power of tyrants?' 'No, you don't need to obey those. . . . ' 'I see, only lawful laws, so to speak. Fine! But suppose the minority coerces the majority to its own advantage, don't I need to obey those laws?' 'Of course not.' 'But if the majority coerce the minority, is that contrary to right? . . . ' You see what the young fellow was driving at: he didn't need external signs, but he showed that he needed to feel in his soul universal truth, the highest truth, so to speak, the truth of life, sanctity. . . . Pericles, you see, hadn't understood this. . . . Not merely Pericles, the whole country rested on slavery, on past wrong. . . . Religion had dried up, the old sanctity which had consecrated every step, every motion, the whole order, all human relationships,—people had ceased to feel it. . . . But Pericles argued around. . . . He didn't want to confess that their laws had died. . . . He patted the dissolute young fellow on the

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shoulder with a great deal of condescension and said: 'Yes, yes. . . . I see you've got a head on your shoulders. Years ago we used to settle such hard questions.' . . . Well, Alcibiades saw that Pericles was, so to speak, a recognized authority, was quibbling over trifles, didn't treat these conflicts as anything alive,—and waved his hand. 'I'm sorry, my dear sir, that I didn't know you then. . . . Now I'm bored; I'm going to fool along.'

"And that's what he recommended to me, his former teacher. . . ."

VII

The narrator stopped. The train, which was approaching another station, began to slow down. Petr Petrovich reached out his hand and said, as he took his blue cap with a cockade from the hook:

"I'm going again to get something to eat. . . . I confess, my dear Pavel Semenovich, I don't see what you're driving at. . . . Excuse me, it's not philosophy, and God only knows what you are after. We began with Budnikov. All right, we know him. . . . Now the devil knows who this Rogov is, a worn-out rogue, and now I don't know whether you're talking of Xenophon or Alcibiades. . . .

Cutting off dogs' tails. . . . The devil knows what you mean. . . . Kindly allow me to ask how all this concerns me. . . . Just as you wish. . . . I'd better go and get some more vodka. . . ."

He put on his cap, and, holding on to the wall because of the jolting of the train, he went out of the compartment. Just at that moment the fourth passenger on the other upper bench stirred. He had been lying in the shadow, smoking now and then, and he seemed to be interested in the story. He got down, took a seat beside us and said:

"Excuse me, I haven't the honor of being acquainted, but I couldn't help hearing your story and it interested me. So, if you have no objections."

Pavel Semenovitch looked at him. He was a cultured man, carefully dressed, with intelligent eyes which looked steadily through a pair of gold glasses which he was constantly adjusting.

"Yes?" said Pavel Semenovitch. "I see, you heard this. . . ."

"Yes. It interested me. . . . Your point of view, I confess, I don't understand fully. . . ."

"Really, it wasn't any too clear. . . . I meant . . . that in reality everything is so related. . . . And this mutual relationship. . . ."

"Presupposes mutual responsibility?"

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Pavel Semenovitch's face suddenly beamed with joy.

"There! You understand it? . . . Yes, general. . . . Not before Ivan or Petr. . . . Everything is connected, so to speak. . . . One man carelessly throws away a brandy cork and another slips on it and breaks his leg."

The new acquaintance listened attentively. Just then Petr Petrovich came back. He had been mistaken as to the place and with an ironical glance at both, he said, as he hung up his cap:

"Well, now,—what do you want with a cork?"

"No, Petr Petrovich," said Pavel Semenovitch seriously, "you're wrong. . . . The question is, so to speak——"

"You find questions everywhere in the simplest things," said Petr Petrovich. "Don't bother about me. You've got a large enough audience."

"Go on, please," said the gentleman with the gold glasses.

"If you wish. . . . I'll be more than glad, for I've got to get it off my mind. I stopped——"

"You stopped," said Petr Petrovich laughingly, "with Alcibiades. . . . A story, so to speak, from the Ancient Times. Now for the Middle Ages. . . ."

Pavel Semenovitch paid no attention to this sally and turned to the new member of the group:

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"You see how it was. The thing was this way: Gavrilo was married and living by himself. . . . In M. Budnikov's table still lay the ticket with the two lines. . . . There were ugly rumors about it and, of course, they were exaggerated. Gavrilo was the only one who didn't know of them. He kept on working as before, did all he could, and tried. . . . He was a muscular symphony in performance, with his eyes full of general satisfaction and good humor. . . .

"And then Rogov suddenly turned up. He was walking along the path by the yard; he stopped, thought a moment, and called Gavrilo.

"He was a good-hearted Russian. . . . He had pushed Rogov away a little while before, but afterwards he thought no more of it. 'What do you want?' he asked. 'Come here, it's something that concerns you. You'll thank me for it.'

"I'll confess, something warned me. I felt like calling to Rogov and stopping him, for I was sure he was up to some mischief. But it was after the Alcibiades episode . . . and I had no hope in my influence. I stayed at the window. I saw Gavrilo leave his shovel, go up and listen. At first his face showed that he did not comprehend and almost did not care. Then, with the same air of uncertainty, he took off his apron, went into the

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house, put on his cap and rejoined Rogov. Both walked down the street and turned down the hill toward the river. A moment later Yelena came out to the gate, stood and looked after the two men. . . . Her eyes looked sad and frightened. . . .

“From that day on Gavrilov’s character changed sharply. He came back apparently rather drunk. . . . Perhaps from vodka, perhaps from the weight of an unbearable burden which Rogov had suddenly put on his shoulders. . . . In the first place, the amount was absolutely staggering: a mountain of money more than he could count. Then the source of the wealth reminded him of Yelena’s past. Finally he couldn’t understand why she had never mentioned it and this may have given rise to evil suspicions. . . . You see it was like an explosion in his mind. . . . Those two lines which M. Budnikov had made on the ticket kept sinking deeper and deeper into Gavrilov’s soul. . . . The simple-hearted man was absolutely upset. The whole symphony of directness and labor was suddenly interrupted. . . . Gavrilov wandered around in confusion, as if he had been poisoned. . . .

“It began to break him down. . . . At first he walked about grimly with his face clouded. His work began to fall from his hands: he threw down his axe and broke his spade. . . . Just like a well-

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built machine into which some one has hurled a bolt. . . . When Budnikov in surprise began to administer mild rebukes, that shovels cost money and he would have to take it out of Gavrilov's wages, that easy-going man answered with unintelligible and unreasonable rudeness. . . . And Yelena wept more and more. . . .

"Then Gavrilov began to drink and carouse and his usual abode became the dirty den, the 'Crag' on the bank, on the sand near the wharf. . . . This was a small wooden house with a second floor, dark, tilting to one side and propped up with beams. You could see it from the bank; evenings there were usually two lighted windows and the open door, cymbals clashed, and there was a lot of fiddling to amuse the guests. . . . From time to time, you could hear confused shouts—both songs and quarrels and calls for the police. It was an eternally restless place and rather threatening. The very antithesis of the drowsy country life. . . . Bargemen from our modest and usually idle wharf, workmen from the brickyards like moles which had burrowed in the damp clay, professional beggars . . . in a word, the homeless, unfortunate, dissipated, and evil. Even the decent members of the proletariat shunned this place. And that's where Rogov took Gavrilov. And Yelena was the next to

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learn the road to the 'Craggs' so as to bring her husband home. . . .

"She did this surprisingly modestly, quietly, yes, even beautifully. Once I was coming home from my lessons and as I entered the gate I saw Yelena running toward me and fastening a kerchief on her head.

" 'Where are you going, Yelena?'

"A moment's hesitation.

" 'You haven't seen Gavril Stepanich go this way, have you?' she asked.

" 'He must have. . . . But you shouldn't go there, Yelena.'

I wanted to stop her. . . . But she swept past me angrily and with some apparent pride went to look for Gavril Stepanich, her husband, and she was his lawful wife. . . . In a half-hour I saw her bringing Gavril Stepanich by the arm. He was leaning on her but walking and looking straight ahead with dull, faded and perplexed eyes. But he was walking. By the gate he suddenly straightened up, pushed away her hand and stared at her. . . . His face was dark, but his faded eye had a decided look. . . .

" 'Who are you? Tell me who you are? . . . Oh?'

"She stopped and dropped her hand in despair.

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I thought of that spring morning and their mutual oaths: 'Remember God, Gavrilo Stepanich!' I was terrified: he'll forget right now, this very minute, I thought. . . . Suddenly a spark of knowledge flickered up in his foolish face and he swallowed hard. He didn't say a word but went to his rooms silently. . . . She followed him in terror, respectfully and humbly. . . .

"So it went on: Rogov would beckon to Gavrilo, and he'd go off and begin to carouse. This man got enormous power over Gavrilo, and Yelena objected, humbly, respectfully, timidly, but constantly. She probably looked upon all this as a punishment sent to her as an atonement for her 'sin.' She grew thin, her nice plumpness disappeared, her eyes sank deeper in her head. . . . But when I looked at them I never could decide to call them stupid. Her suffering was always wonderfully intelligent like that of a bird. . . . She'd go to the saloons after her drunken husband, every one would laugh at her on the street, and make rough jokes about her. . . . She felt no shame for herself. . . . Only once she whispered: 'That's not right, Gavrilo Stepanich, people are looking at you. . . .'

"One time when she was taking him back from the 'Craggs,' he broke away from her, ran up to

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Budnikov's door and began to kick it wildly. Yelena almost dropped, and, as if she did not have the strength to go after him, she watched him like a man with the nightmare, who sees coming at him something terrible which he has been expecting but he can't struggle against it. . . . The door suddenly opened and M. Budnikov appeared. . . . Calm and haughty with an air of absolute superiority. To tell you the truth, I was somewhat surprised. . . . Anyway, it was a delicate situation. I didn't know the details at the time, but I felt there was something wrong and mistaken. . . . Suddenly clearness of vision, quiet, calm. And it wasn't put on. No,—that was easy to see. . . . It was merely absolute imperturbability.

“‘What do you want, Gavril?’ he said. ‘What are you kicking for? Don't you know how to ring? . . . You see, here's the bell. . . .’

“He pointed to the bell handle. Gavril looked at it and became confused. Yes, there was a knob and there was really no reason to kick. . . . M. Budnikov continued from the top step:

“‘Anyway, what are you thinking about and what do you want of me, you r-rascal? Have I insulted you, dealt unjustly with you, held up your pay for even one day? Yet you kicked. . . . All right, here I am. . . . What do you want?’

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"Gavrilo didn't say a word. . . .

" 'Well, then, I'll tell you a thing or two myself: the shovel's broken again, the walk isn't swept, the horse hasn't been watered. . . . The horse is a dumb animal and can't talk . . . but just the same it's alive and feels. . . . Hear it whinney? . . . '

"This argument so overwhelmed Gavrilo that he turned, thoroughly and definitely crushed, and went straight to the stable. In a minute, just as if he were sober, he took the horse to the trough. . . . M. Budnikov quietly locked his door and came out. As he came past my wall he guessed that I had seen the whole affair, stopped, and with a sad shake of his head, remarked:

" 'Yes, every one's talking of the people, the people. . . . How do they fall in love with them? . . . ' "

VIII

"The scandal began to attract attention. It was talked about in the city. Various opinions were held. Some defended Budnikov. Was it worth while to believe mere rumors? Really no one knew anything. Some were stupid stories; others, evident scandals and an unseemly breaking of the general quiet. . . . But there was another side. People of

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the lower classes sympathized with Gavrilov. They thought that the wise and strong M. Budnikov must have filched from Gavrilov some sort of a talisman and was now committing sorcery so that the talisman would lose its power. . . . So dozens of eyes were turned to the windows of M. Budnikov and looked at him as he passed, stubbornly and calmly, apparently unaware of the cloud of misunderstanding, suspicion, condemnation, question, . . . yes, sin, which trailed after him. Every look expressed an evil thought and every heart was beating with an evil feeling. . . . It was a peculiar sort of dark cloud. . . . Hundreds of individual spiritual movements, confused, unclear, but evil. . . . And all aimed at one centre. . . .

"I must say Budnikov had been rather popular and enjoyed the respect of all. . . . Even Rogov, when he happened to pass our yard and saw M. Budnikov with a shovel or rake, always stopped and said:

" 'M. Budnikov, Semen Nikolayevich, is working. . . . He who works shall eat.' "

"Or:

" 'M. Budnikov is helping his neighbor, the porter, with the work of his hands. Most laudable! ' "

"Then he passed on as by an object to which he

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was indifferent or at which he was pleasantly amused.

"Now, that was all changed. . . . It gave me a physical sensation . . . like a nightmare. As if those two lines . . . or something in the character of M. Budnikov had polluted the atmosphere. . . . It was almost an hallucination. . . . You're going to or from the gymnasium . . . thinking out your remarks. . . . You suddenly feel that M. Budnikov is following you with his measured tread and his self-satisfaction that comes from a consciousness of duty performed. . . . Or you're giving a lesson or reading necessary notices and you absolutely hear Budnikov's accents in your own voice . . . when he lays down to a beggar rules for work or preaches a moral to Gavrilov over the broken shovel or advises me: 'Lay aside pride and be humble.' . . .

"In this ordinary thing, this humble and apparently quiet life of peaceful corners, there's something terrible, . . . specific, so to speak; not easily noticeable, gray. . . . Really where are the rascals, sacrifices, the right, the wrong? . . . You so want the fog to be pierced by even one ray of living, absolute truth, which will not be founded on pencil lines, but will be actually able to solve the riddle absolutely and completely . . . the real

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truth, which even Rogov will acknowledge. . . .
Do you understand?

“‘I think I do,’ said the gentleman in the glasses seriously.

“Apparently M. Budnikov began to feel that something was wrong. He cleaned up but, as often happens, he didn’t find the real question. . . . He came to me once on the usual day, the twentieth. You understand I gave him tea as usual. . . . He drank it as usual, but his expression was different. Sad and solemn. He finished his business, carefully put away the money in his pocketbook, marked it down, but didn’t leave. . . . He began to talk round the bush . . . about the abnormality of his life, . . . in particular about his loneliness, some mistake caused by prejudice and pride. . . . Then he got talking of Yelena and Gavriilo. Gavriilo had turned out to be utterly worthless and Yelena had made a mistake and was very unhappy. . . . He felt responsible for letting her marry, but it was hard to correct it. . . . It was harder still to fix it up with money. . . . What good is money in the hands of a drunkard? And so on. All these subterfuges showed me that M. Budnikov wanted to solve the whole riddle by recreating the original situation, so to speak,—that is, to divorce Yelena from Gavriilo and marry her himself. . . . That

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meant those two lines would be wiped out and disappear. . . . Apparently . . . he had already talked of this with several people, among them Father Nikolay. . . . Now he wanted my advice. . . .

“‘Have you spoken to Yelena about this?’ I asked.

“‘No, not yet. . . . I, perhaps, you may notice, don’t even go to see her, so as not to make trouble. . . . But I know what she needs. . . . I have no reason to doubt. . . .’

“‘I tried to advance certain points, but M. Budnikov wouldn’t listen. . . . He soon said good-by and left. . . . As if he feared for the integrity of his whole plan of action. . . .

“‘A little while after, when Gavrilov was away, some women of the parish began to bob up at Yelena’s and Budnikov received members of the consistory. Twice, toward evening, I saw Rogov leave Budnikov’s. . . . Then I thought: so that’s what my young fellow is after; I see now why he’s ruining Gavrilov; he’s fixing it so M. Budnikov can arrange the divorce. . . .

“‘The whole situation seemed to me so disgraceful and hopeless that I began to think of moving and simply getting away from the whole thing. . . . I couldn’t sleep. . . . Again I began to walk around the garden. Once I found Yelena in it. . . . She

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was lying on that same bench where I sat that spring morning. . . . It was fall now. . . . Everything was dying and growing bare. . . . Autumn, you know, is a terrible cynic. The wind breaks off the leaves and laughs. They were lying on the muddy, damp earth. And a woman was lying on the damp bench with her face down and crying. Yes, she was crying bitterly. . . . Later I found out why: the arrangement of M. Budnikov was absolutely impersonal. When she heard this proposition she merely clasped her hands: 'Let the earth swallow me up, let me dry up like a chip.' . . . And so on. . . . 'You'd better bury me alive with Gavriilo Stepanich.' . . . And Gavriilo Stepanich didn't spend the night at home. That former pure happiness had perished and she didn't know what to do. A ticket . . . two lines . . . friends from the church, Budnikov, Rogov. She was stupid and obedient and afraid that something would be done against her will. . . .

"I walked up to her . . . wanted to comfort her. When I touched her and felt her body tremble beneath my touch . . . it seemed to me such a stupid performance that I trembled, as if from impotent pity. . . .

"I went away. . . . I forgot the whole thing and wanted to drop it and leave. If M. Budnikov

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passed . . . let him pass. . . . If Rogov was engaged in dirty business, let him! If stupid Yelena wanted a drunken husband, let her have one. . . . What did I care? What difference did it make who got the ticket with the two lines, to whom those stupid lines gave rights? . . . Everything was incomplete, accidental, disconnected, senseless and disgusting. . . .”

IX

Pavel Semenovich stopped and looked out of the window as if he had forgotten the story. . . .

“Well, how did it end?” asked our new companion cautiously.

“End?” The narrator woke up. “Of course, everything on the earth ends some way. This ended stupidly and simply. One night . . . my bell rang. Sharply, anxiously, nervously. . . . I jumped up in fright, put on my slippers . . . went out on the steps . . . there was no one there. But it occurred to me that Rogov was around the corner. I thought he must have been passing drunk and ugly and wanted to annoy me by coming at this time. . . . He remembered that I was asleep and he, Vanichka Rogov, my favorite pupil, was drunk on the street and wanted to inform me of it. I closed the door,

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went back to bed, and fell asleep. The bell rang again. I didn't get up. Let him ring. . . . It rang again and again. . . . No, this must be something else. I put on my overcoat. . . . Opened the door. There stood the night watchman. His beard was covered with frost. 'Please,' he said.

" 'Where do you want me to go, brother?' I asked.

" 'To Semen Nikolayevich, M. Budnikov. . . . They've had . . . trouble. . . .'

"Without understanding anything, I dressed mechanically and went. A clear cold night, and late. . . . There were lights in the windows of M. Budnikov, whistles along the street. . . . What a stir for night. . . . I went up the steps and entered. The first thing that caught my eye was the face of Semen Nikolayevich, M. Budnikov. . . . Absolutely different, not at all like what he was before. He was lying on his pillow and looking somewhere into space. . . . That was so strange. . . . I stopped at the door and thought: 'What's this? I used to know him but he's suddenly changed. . . . This isn't the man who came once a month and drank two glasses of tea. Who worried over Yelena's divorce, but it's some one with other thoughts. He lay immovable, important, but he didn't look at us or any one, and he seemed so different. . . . He

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was afraid of no one and judged every one; himself, that is, the old Semen Nikolayevich, and Gavril, Yelena, Rogov, and . . . yes, me too. . . . I suddenly understood. . . .

"Then I saw Gavril. By the window, in a corner, grieved but quiet. . . . As I suddenly understood, I walked up to him and said:

" 'Did you do this?'

" 'Of course, Pavel Semenovich, I did.'

" 'Why?'

" 'I don't know, Pavel Semenovich. . . .'

"Then the doctor attracted my attention. He told me that there was no help. . . . People kept walking and driving up, coming in, sitting down, and writing statements. . . . It seemed so strange that the young prosecutor, such a careful and reliable man, should give orders not to let Gavril and Yelena go and to hold some sort of an investigation. . . . I remember his smile when I asked him the reason for it. . . . I'll admit it was a strange question but I thought that this procedure was unnecessary. . . . When they started to take Gavril and Yelena away I involuntarily got up and asked if they were going to take me. . . . I later heard rumors that something was wrong with me. That was false. My head was never so clear. . . . The prosecutor was surprised. 'If I may give you ad-

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vice, you need to drink some water and go to bed.' 'But Yelena?' I asked; 'why her?' 'We will hope,' he answered, 'that everything will turn out in a way that's best for her, but now . . . at the first inquiry . . . it is my painful duty.' . . . I still thought he was acting wrongly. . . .

"The two were taken away. I went back to my rooms and sat down on the steps. It was cold. . . . A clear, autumn, quiet night with a clear, white frost. . . . The stars were sparkling and whispering in the sky. They had such a special expression and meaning. . . . You could hear their mysterious whisper, though you couldn't make out what they said. . . . It was both a distant tremor of alarm and also quiet and neighborly sympathy.

"I really wasn't surprised when Rogov came up quietly and timidly sat down beside me on the steps. He sat a long time without saying a word. . . . I don't remember whether he did say anything, but I knew the whole story. . . . He had no thoughts of murder. He wanted 'to win Yelena's case with M. Budnikov' for himself. He had to get hold of the ticket, on which, as he supposed, was an endorsement. . . . This clever scheme pleased him: to get hold by illegal means of the proof of a legal right. He saw something humorous in it. The illegal procuring of legal proof in the

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form of a hypothetical endorsement. . . . That's why he worked his way into Budnikov's confidence through the business of the divorce. . . . He found out everything about the place and sent one of his obedient clients from the 'Craggs' to take the proper box. Gavrilov was to open the door of M. Budnikov's apartment with a second key, which Budnikov, through strange oversight, had failed to take back from him. Instead of waiting at the door, Gavrilov had gone upstairs. I could have sworn I had seen him walk along with his heavy tread, his dark head, and the deep hatred in his soul. . . . And how he reached the door and how M. Budnikov awoke and apparently was not even frightened but suddenly understood the whole situation.

"I still saw that moment in the past, when two students ran into my rooms on just such a bright night, and I faced them in my shame and weakness. . . . What a fire . . . evil and sarcastic . . . was blazing in the eyes of one. . . .

"It seemed to me that I had discovered that which was the bond of union among all things: these lofty, flashing stars, the living murmur of the wind among the branches, my memories, and this deed. . . . When I was young I had often had this sensation. . . . When my fresh mind was trying to

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solve all questions and gain a larger truth. Another time you will seem to be right at the threshold and everything is about to be cleared up, when it all vanishes

“We sat a long time. Finally Rogov got up.

“‘Where are you going now?’ I asked.

“‘I don’t know,’ was the answer, ‘what I must do. . . . I think I’ll have to join Gavril and Yelena. . . .’

“There he stood. I understood so much more clearly than usual, and I suddenly realized that he was waiting for me to shake hands. I held out my hand and he suddenly seized it, and it was a long time before he let it go. . . .

“He broke away and left . . . straight down the street. I looked after him. as long as I could make out the slender figure of my former pupil. . . .”

* * * * *

For some time the silence in the compartment was interrupted only by the rattling of the train and a long whistle. The door slammed, and a conductor walked along the corridor and called out:

“Station of N-sk. Ten minutes’ wait.”

Pavel Semenovich hurriedly got up, picked up a small valise, and, with a sad smile at his audience, he got out of the train. I began to make prepara-

ISN'T IT TERRIBLE?

tions to leave and so did the gentleman in the gold glasses. Petr Petrovich remained alone. He looked after Pavel Semenovich and, when the door was shut behind him, he smiled at the gentleman in the gold glasses, shook his head, and, running his finger around his forehead, he said:

"He always was a crank. . . . Now I think he's not all there. I've heard that he threw up his position and now goes around and gives private lessons."

The gentleman in the gold glasses looked steadily at him but said nothing.

We got out of the train.

• • • • •

From the point of view of a reporter the case was uninteresting. The jurors acquitted Gavriilo (Yelena was not tried); Rogov was convicted of being the instigator, but mercy was recommended. The judge several times had to stop the witness Pavel Semenovich Padorin, former teacher, who constantly wandered away from facts, in order to express opinions which were irrelevant and had nothing to do with the case. . . .



“NECESSITY”

(AN EASTERN TALE)

“NECESSITY”

(AN EASTERN TALE)

I

ONE day, when the three good sages,—Ulaya, Darnu, and Purana,—were sitting at the door of their common home, young Kassapa, the son of the Rajah Lichava, came up to them and sat down on the earth which was piled around the house but he did not speak. The young man's cheeks were pale and his eyes, which had lost the glow of youth, seemed weary.

The old men looked one at another, and good Ulaya said:

“Listen, Kassapa, tell to us, the three sages, who wish you nothing but good, what is oppressing your soul. Ever since you lay in the cradle, fate has showered its gifts upon you and you look as downcast as the meanest slave of your father, poor Jebaka, who yesterday felt the heavy hand of your steward. . . .”

“Yes, poor Jebaka showed us the welts on his back,” said stern Darnu and kindly Purana added:

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"We wished to call them to your attention, good Kassapa."

The young man did not allow him to finish. He jumped up from his seat and exclaimed with an impatience which he had never before displayed:

"Stop, kindly sages, with your sly reproaches! You seem to think that I must give you account for every welt inflicted by the steward on the back of the slave Jebaka. I greatly doubt whether I am bound to give account even of my own acts."

The sages glanced again one at another and Ulaya said:

"Continue, my son, if you so desire."

"Desire?" interrupted the young man with a bitter laugh. "The fact is, I don't know whether I desire anything or not. And whether I like what I wish or what another wishes for me."

He stopped. It was almost perfectly quiet but a breeze stirred the tops of the trees, and a leaf fell at the feet of Purana. While the sad gaze of Kassapa was directed upon this, a stone broke off from the heated cliff and rolled down to the bank of a brook, where a large lizard was resting at this moment. . . . Every day at the same hour it crawled to this spot. Straightening its front legs and closing its protruding eyes, it apparently listened to the discourse of the sages. It was easy

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to imagine that its green body contained the soul of some wise Brahmin. But this day that stone released this soul from its green envelope, so that it might enter upon new transformations. . . .

A bitter smile spread over Kassapa's face.

"Come now, ye kindly sages," he said, "ask this leaf, if it wished to fall from the tree, or the stone, if it wished to break off from the cliff, or the lizard, if it wished to be crushed by the stone. The hour came, the leaf fell, the lizard heard the last of your conversations. For all that we know could not be otherwise. Or do ye say that it should and could have been otherwise than it was?"

"It could not," answered the sages. "What has been had to be in the great chain of events."

"Ye have spoken. Therefore, the welts on the back of Jebaka had to be in the great chain of events, and every one of them has been written since eternity in the book of necessity. And you wish me, the same kind of a stone, the same kind of a lizard, the same kind of a leaf on the great tree of life, the same kind of an insignificant stream as this brook which is driven by an unknown power from source to mouth. . . . You wish me to struggle against the current which is carrying me onward. . . ."

He kicked the bloody stone which fell into the

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water and he again sank back on the earth beside the good sages. The eyes of Kassapa again became dull and sad.

Old Darnu said nothing; old Purana shook his head; but the cheerful Ulaya merely laughed and said:

"In the book of necessity, it is also manifestly written, Kassapa, that I should tell to you what happened once to the two sages, Darnu and Purana, whom you see before you. . . . And in the same book it is written that you shall listen to the tale."

Then he told the following strange story about his companions and they listened smilingly, but neither confirmed or denied a word.

II

"In the land," he said, "where blooms the lotus and the sacred stream flows upon its course,—there were no Brahmins more wise than Darnu and Purana. No one had learned the Shastras better and no one had dipped more deeply into the ancient wisdom of the Vedas. But when both approached the end of the mortal span of life and the storms of approaching winter had touched their hair with snow, both were still dissatisfied. The years were passing; the grave was coming nearer and nearer,

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and truth seemed to recede further and further. . . ."

Both then, well aware that it was impossible to escape the grave, decided to draw truth nearer to themselves. Darnu was the first to put on a wanderer's robe, to hang a gourd of water on his belt, to take a staff in his hand and to set out. After two years of difficult traveling, he came to the foot of a lofty mountain and on one of its peaks, at an altitude where the clouds love to pass the night, he saw the ruins of a temple. In a meadow near the road shepherds were watching their flocks, and Darnu asked them what sort of a temple it was, what people had built it, and to what god they had offered sacrifices.

The shepherds merely looked at the mountain and then at Darnu, their questioner, for they did not know what answer to make. Finally they said:

"We inhabitants of the valleys, do not know how to answer you. There is among our number an old shepherd Anuruja, who ages ago used to pasture his flocks on these heights. He may know."

They called this old man.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "what people built it, when they did it, and to what god they here sacrificed. But my father heard from his father and told me that my great grandfather had said

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that there once lived a tribe of sages on the slopes of these mountains and that they have all perished, since they have erected this temple. The name of the deity was 'Necessity.' "

"Necessity?" exclaimed Darnu, greatly interested. "Don't you know, good father, what form this deity had and whether or not it still resides in this temple?"

"We are simple people," answered the old man, "and it is hard for us to answer your wise questions. When I was young,—and that was years and years ago,—I used to pasture my flock on these mountain sides. At that time there stood in the temple an idol wrought out of a gleaming black stone. At rare intervals, when a storm overtook me in the vicinity,—and storms are very terrible among these crags,—I used to drive my flock into the old temple for shelter. Rarely, too, Angapali, a shepherdess from a neighboring hillside, would run in, trembling and frightened. I warmed her in my arms and the old god looked down at us with a strange smile. But he never did us any evil, perchance because Angapali always adorned him with flowers. But they say . . ."

The shepherd stopped with a doubtful look at Darnu and was apparently ashamed to tell him more.

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"Say what? My good man, tell me the whole story," requested the sage.

"They say, all the worshippers of the old god have not perished. . . . Some are wandering around the world. . . . And, sometimes, of course rarely, they come here and ask like you the road to the temple and they go there to question the old god. These he turns to stone. Old men have often seen in the temple columns or statues in the form of seated men, richly covered with morning-glories and other vines. Birds have built their nests on some. Later on they gradually turn to dust."

Darnu pondered deeply over the story. "Am I now near the goal?" he thought. For it is well known that "he, who like a blind man sees naught, like a deaf man, hears naught, like a tree is immovable and insensible, has attained unto rest and knowledge."

He turned to the shepherd.

"My friend, where is the road to the temple?"

The shepherd pointed it out, and when Darnu commenced to ascend the overgrown path, he watched the sage a long time and then said to his young companions:

"Call me not the oldest of shepherds, but the youngest of suckling lambs if the old god is not soon going to have a new sacrifice. Yoke me like

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an ox or burden me like an ass with various loads, if another stone column is not to take its place in the old temple! . . .”

The shepherds respectfully hearkened to the old man and scattered over the pasture. And once more the herds grazed peacefully in the valley, the ploughman followed his plough, the sun shone, night fell, and men were occupied with their own cares and thought no more of wise Darnu. Soon,—in a few days or so,—another wanderer came to the foot of the mountain and he, too, asked about the temple. When he followed the directions of the shepherd and began to ascend the mountain cheerfully, the old man shook his head and said:

“There goes another.”

This was Purana, following in the steps of wise Darnu and thinking:

“It will never be said that Darnu found truth which Purana could not seek.

III

Darnu ascended the mountain.

It was a hard climb. It was very evident that a human foot rarely passed over the neglected path, but Darnu cheerfully defied all obstacles and finally reached the half-ruined gates, above which was the

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ancient inscription: "I am Necessity, the mistress of every movement." The walls had no other sculptures or decorations save fragments of some numbers and mysterious calculations.

Darnu entered the sanctuary. The old walls spread abroad the peace of destruction and death. But this destruction apparently had grown weary and left undisturbed the ruins of walls which had witnessed the march of centuries. In one wall there was a broad recess; several steps led up to an altar, on which was an idol of a gleaming black stone; the deity smiled strangely as it gazed upon this picture of ruin. From beneath it bubbled a brook which filled the wondrous silence with the murmur of its water. Several palms stretched their roots into its course and towered up to the blue sky, which freely looked down through the ruined roof. . . .

Darnu involuntarily submitted to the wondrous spell of this place and decided to question the mysterious deity, whose spirit still seemed to fill the ruined temple. The sage scooped up some water out of the cold brook and gathered some fruit which an old fig-tree had shed and then he began his preparations according to all the rules in the books on contemplation. First of all he sat down facing the idol, drew up his legs, and looked at the image

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a long time, for he wanted to impress it upon his mind. Then he bared his abdomen and gazed upon that spot where he was bound to his mother before his earthly birth. For it is well known that all knowledge lies between being and not being and hence must come the revelations of contemplation. . . .

In such a posture he saw the end of the first day and the beginning of the second. The heat of noon several times replaced the cool of evening and the shadows of night gave place to the light of the sun,—but Darnu remained in the same position, rarely plunging his gourd into the water or absent-mindedly picking up some fruit. The eyes of the sage grew dull and fixed; his limbs dried up. At first he felt the inconvenience and pain of immobility. Later on these sensations passed into complete unconsciousness, and before the stony gaze of the sage another world, the world of contemplation, began to unroll its strange apparitions and shapes. They no longer bore any relationship to the experiences of the meditating sage. They were disinterested, disconnected, and concerned only themselves, and that meant that they were the preludes to a revelation of the truth.

It was hard to say how long this state continued. The water in the gourd dried up, the palms quietly

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rustled, the ripening fruits broke off and fell at the sage's feet, but he let them lie on the ground. He was almost freed from thirst and hunger. He was not warmed by the noontide sun nor chilled by the cool freshness of the night. Finally he ceased to distinguish the light of day and the darkness of night.

Then the inner eye of Darnu saw the long expected vision. Out of his abdomen grew a green trunk of bamboo tipped with a knot like an ordinary stem. From the knot grew another section and thus, rising ever higher, the trunk grew to consist of fifty joints, a number corresponding to the years of the sage. At the top, instead of leaves and blossoms, grew a something resembling the idol in the temple. This something looked down on Darnu with an evil smile.

"Poor Darnu," it said finally. "Why did you come here and take so much trouble? What do you want, poor Darnu?"

"I seek the truth," answered the sage.

"Then look on me, for I am what you sought. But I see that I am unpleasant and disagreeable to your sight."

"You are incomprehensible," answered Darnu.

"Listen, Darnu. Do you see the fifty joints of the reed?"

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"The fifty joints of the reed are my years," said the sage.

"And I sit above them, for I am 'Necessity,' the mistress of every movement. Every act, every breath, everything existing, everything living is impotent, powerless, helpless; under the control of necessity it attains the aim of its existence, which is death. I am that which has guided the fifty joints of your life from the cradle to the present moment. You have never done a single thing in your whole life: not a single thing of good or evil. . . . You have never given a coin to a beggar in a moment of pity nor dealt a single blow with hatred in your heart . . . you have never cared for a single rose in your monastery gardens nor felled a single tree in the forest . . . you have never fed a single animal nor killed a single gnat which was sucking your blood. . . . You have never made a single movement in your whole life without it being marked down in advance by me. . . . Because I am Necessity. . . . You have been proud of your actions or lamented bitterly for your sins. Your heart trembled from love or hate, but I—I was laughing at you, for I am Necessity and write down everything in advance. When you entered a square to teach fools what to do or what to avoid,—I was laughing and saying to myself:

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just see wise Darnu reveal his wisdom to those naïve fools and share his sanctity with sinners. Not because Darnu is wise and holy, but because I, 'Necessity,' am like a stream and Darnu is like a leaf carried away by the current. Poor Darnu, you thought that you had been led hither by your search for truth. . . . But on these walls among my calculations was marked the day and the hour when you had to cross this threshold. Because I am Necessity. . . . Poor sage!"

"I loathe you," said the seer with aversion.

"I know it. Because you considered yourself free and I am Necessity, the mistress of every movement."

Then Darnu became angry; he seized the fifty joints of the reed, broke them off, and flung them away. "So," he said, "so will I deal with the fifty joints of my life, because during these fifty years I was merely the tool of Necessity. Now I will free myself, because I have seen and I want to break my yoke."

But Necessity, invisible in the darkness which surrounded the dull gaze of the sage, laughed and repeated:

"No, poor Darnu, you are still mine, because I am Necessity."

Darnu opened his eyes with difficulty and sud-

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denly he felt that his feet were swollen and painful. He started to rise, but at once he sank back again. Because he now saw clearly the significance of all the inscriptions and calculations in the temple. As soon as he began to move his limbs, he saw that his desire to do so had already been written on the wall.

As from another world, the voice of Necessity came to his ears:

"Rise now, poor Darnu; your limbs are swollen. You see 999,998 of your brothers in darkness do it. . . . It is *necessary*."

In disgust Darnu remained in his former position, which now became still more painful. But he said to himself: "I will be one of those in the darkness who will not submit to Necessity, because I am free."

Meanwhile the sun had reached the zenith, and as it looked through the holes in the roof, it began to parch the ill-protected body of the sage. . . . Darnu stretched out his hand toward his gourd.

But he at once saw what was written on the wall under the number 999,998 and Necessity again said:

"Poor sage, it is *necessary* that you drink."

Darnu left the gourd untouched and said:

"I will not drink, because I am free."

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There came a laugh from a distant corner of the temple and at the same time one of the fruits of the fig-tree grew too heavy to hang any longer and fell at the feet of the sage. At the same time a number on the wall changed. Darnu realized at once that this was a new attempt of Necessity to destroy his inner liberty.

"I will not eat," he said, "because I am free."

Again there came a laugh from the depths of the temple and he heard the murmuring of the brook:

"Poor Darnu!"

The sage became more angry. He remained motionless without looking at the fruit which from time to time fell from the boughs, without hearkening to the seductive murmur of the waters, and he kept repeating one phrase to himself: "I am free, free, free!" And that no fruit might thwart his freedom by falling directly into his mouth, he closed it tightly and clenched his teeth.

Thus he sat for a long time, freeing himself from hunger and thirst and trying to spread abroad to all the corners of the earth confidence in his inner liberty. He grew thin, dried up, became wooden, lost track of time and space. He could no longer distinguish day and night, but he kept repeating and asserting to himself that he was free. After

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a certain space of time, the birds became accustomed to his immobility, flew up and perched upon him, and still later a pair of wild doves built their nest on the head of the free sage and heedlessly brought forth their young in the folds of his turban.

"O foolish birds!" thought wise Darnu, when first the calling of the parents and the peeping of the young penetrated his consciousness. "They do all this because they are not free and obey the laws of Necessity." And even when his shoulders were covered with the droppings of the birds,—he again said to himself:

"Fools! They do *this* too, because they are not free."

He counted himself perfectly free and close to the gods.

Below, out of the soil, the thin tendrils of climbing vines began to rise and to wind themselves around his immovable limbs. . . .

IV

Only once was the wise Darnu partially recalled from complete unconsciousness and at that time he felt in some remote corner of his mind a sensation of mild astonishment.

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This was caused by the appearance of the sage Purana. Exactly like Darnu he walked up to the temple, read the inscription above the entrance, and then going in, began to read the figures on the walls. The wise Purana was very unlike his stern companion. He was kindly and had a round face. A cross-section of his trunk would have formed a circle, his pleasant eyes sparkled, and his lips wore a smile. In his wisdom he was never obstinate like Darnu, and he sought blessed peace far more zealously than he did freedom.

Walking around the temple, he came to the recess, revered the deity, and then, with a glance at the brook and the fig tree, he said:

"Here is a deity with a pleasant smile, and there is a stream of fresh water and a fig-tree. What more does a man need for pleasant contemplation? Yes, and there's Darnu. He is so blessed that the birds are building their nests upon him. . . ."

The appearance of his wise friend was not especially joyous, but Purana, gazing at him reverently, said to himself:

"There's no doubt he's blessed; but he always loved too stern methods of contemplation. I do not aspire to the higher stages of blessedness, but I hope to tell the dwellers upon earth what I see on the lower planes."

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Then after enjoying the water and the juicy fruit, he sat down comfortably not far from Darnu, and he too prepared for contemplation in the proper way: that is, by baring his abdomen and gazing at it as the other sage had done.

So passed a time, more slowly than with Darnu, for the kindly Purana often interrupted his contemplation to enjoy the water and the juicy fruit. Finally out of the navel of the second wise man sprang a bamboo trunk and this attained a height of fifty joints, the number of the years of his life. On the top again sat "Necessity," but in his semi-conscious state she seemed to him to smile pleasantly and he replied in the same way.

"Who are you, kind deity?" he asked.

"I am Necessity, who has governed the fifty years of your life. All that you have done, you did not do, but I did them, for you are but a leaf swept along by the stream and I am the mistress of every movement."

"Blessed art thou," said Purana. "I see that I have not come to you in vain. Continue in the future to execute your tasks for yourself and me and I will watch for you in pleasant contemplation."

He lost himself in sleep with a happy smile on his lips. So he continued his pleasant contempla-

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tion, from time to time filling his gourd with water or picking up fruit which had fallen to the ground at his feet. Each time he stirred with less and less pleasure, since the drowsiness of contemplation was more and more strongly mastering him, and since he had already eaten the fruit which was nearest to him, he had to exert himself to obtain them from the tree.

Finally he said to himself:

"I'm a foolish man far removed from truth, and that's why I have such foolish cares. Isn't it because this good deity is so slow with her revelations? Here before me on the tree is ripe fruit and my stomach is empty. . . . But doesn't the law of necessity say: 'where there is an hungry stomach and fruit, the latter must of necessity enter the former'? . . . So, kind necessity, I submit to your power. . . . Isn't that the greatest blessedness?"

Thereupon he buried himself in complete contemplation like Darnu, and he waited for necessity to manifest herself. In order to facilitate her task, he held his mouth open facing the fig tree. . . .

He waited one day, two, three. . . . Gradually the smile congealed upon his face, his body dried up, the pleasant rotundity of his form disappeared, the fat under his skin wasted away and the sinews

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stood out distinctly through it. When at last the fruit ripened and fell, striking Purana on the nose,—the sage did not hear it fall nor did he feel the blow. . . . Another pair of doves built a nest in the folds of his turban, fledglings peeped soon in the nest, and the shoulders of Purana were covered thickly with the droppings of the birds. When the luxurious vines had enveloped Purana, it was impossible to distinguish him from his companion—the obstinate sage struggling against Necessity from the good-natured sage willingly submitting to it.

Absolute silence reigned in the temple, and the gleaming idol looked down on the two sages with its enigmatic and strange smile.

Fruit ripened and fell from the trees, the brook bubbled on, white clouds sailed across the blue sky and looked down into the interior of the temple and the sages sat on without manifesting any signs of life—one in the blessedness of denial, the other in the blessedness of submission to Necessity.

V

Eternal night had spread its black wings over both and no living being would ever have known the truth which the two sages had perceived at the

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summit of the fifty joints of the reed. But before the last spark which illumined in the darkness the consciousness of wise Darnu had been finally extinguished,—he heard again the same voice as before: Necessity was laughing in the gathering darkness, and this laughter, taciturn and soundless, seemed to Darnu a presentiment of death. . . .

“Poor Darnu,” said the implacable deity, “piti-able sage! You thought you could leave me, you hoped that you could lay aside my yoke and by turning into an immobile column purchase thereby the consciousness of spiritual liberty. . . .”

“Yes, I am free,” answered the thought of the obstinate sage. I alone in the darkness of your servants do not obey the commands of Necessity. . . .”

“Look here, poor Darnu. . . .”

Suddenly with his inner eye he saw again the meaning of all the inscriptions and calculations on the walls of the temple. The numbers quietly changed, they grew or diminished automatically and one of them especially attracted his attention. It was the number 999,998. . . . And as he looked at it, two units more fell on the wall and the long number quietly began to change. Darnu trembled and Necessity smiled again.

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“You understood, poor sage? In every hundred thousand of my blind servants there is always one obstinate man like you, and one lazy man like Purana. . . . You have both come here. . . . Greetings, ye sages, who have completed my calculations. . . .”

Two tears rolled down from the dull eyes of the sage; they quietly rolled down over his dried up cheeks and fell upon the ground like two ripe fruits from the tree of his aged wisdom.

Beyond the walls of the temple everything went as usual. The sun shone, the winds blew, the people in the valley busied themselves with their cares, the clouds gathered in the heavens. . . . As they crossed the mountains, they became heavy and weak. A storm broke in the mountains. . . .

Again as in times of yore, a foolish shepherd from a neighboring hillside drove hither his flock and from another direction a young and foolish shepherdess drove hither her flock. They met by the brook and the recess out of which the deity looked at them with its strange smile, and while the thunder roared, they embraced and cooed, just as 999,999 pairs had done in the same situation. If wise Darnu could have seen and heard them, he would certainly have said in the greatness of his wisdom:

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"Fools, they are doing this not for themselves but for the pleasure of Necessity."

The storm passed, the sun again played upon the grass, which was still covered with the sparkling drops of rain and lighted up the darkened interior of the temple.

"Look," said the shepherdess, "see those two new statues. They never were here before."

"Hush," answered the shepherd. "Old men say that these are worshippers of the ancient deity. But they can't do any harm. . . . Stay with them and I'll go and find your stray sheep."

He went out and left her alone with the idol and the two sages. Because she was a little afraid and because she was filled with youthful love and delight, she could not remain in one place but kept walking around the temple and singing loud songs of love and joy. When the storm was entirely passed and the edge of the dark cloud had hidden itself behind the distant summits of the range of mountains, she pulled some damp flowers and decked the idol with them. To conceal its unpleasant smile, she stuck in its mouth a fruit of the mountain nut with its leaves and stem.

Then she looked at it and laughed aloud.

That did not seem enough. She wanted to adorn the old men with flowers. But since good

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Purana still carried the nest with the young birds, she turned her attention to stern Darnu, whose nest had been abandoned. She removed the empty nest, cleaned of bird droppings the turban, hair and shoulders of the sage and washed his face with spring water. She thought that in this way she was recompensing the gods for their protection of her happiness. Because even this seemed little and she was overflowing with joy, she bent over and suddenly the blessed Darnu, standing on the very threshold of Nirvana, felt on his dry lips the vigorous kiss of the foolish girl. . . .

Soon after the shepherd returned with a lamb which he had found, and the two went off, singing a cheerful song.

VI

In the meantime, that spark which had not been quite extinguished in the consciousness of wise Darnu, flickered up and commenced to burn brighter and brighter. First of all, in him as in a house where everyone is sleeping, thought awoke and began to wander restlessly in the darkness. Wise Darnu thought a whole hour and formed only one phrase:

“They were subject to Necessity. . . .”

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Another hour:

"But in the last instance, I too was subject to it. . . ."

A third hour brought a new premise:

"In picking the fruit, I obeyed the law of Necessity."

A fourth:

"But in refusing, I fulfilled her calculations."

A fifth:

"Those fools live and love, but wise Purana and I die."

A sixth:

"This perhaps is a work of Necessity, but it has very little sense."

Then awakened thought finally stirred itself and began to rouse other sleeping faculties:

"If Purana and I die," said wise Darnu to himself, "it will be inevitable but foolish. If I succeed in saving myself and my companion, it will be likewise necessary but sensible. Therefore we will save ourselves. For this I need will and strength."

He rallied the little spark of will which had not been extinguished. He compelled it to raise his heavy eyelids.

The daylight broke in upon his consciousness, as it floods a room on the opening of the shutters.

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First he noticed the lifeless figure of his friend, with his set face and the tear that precedes death already on his cheeks. Darnu's heart felt such pity for his ill-fated fellow seeker after truth that his will became stronger and stronger. It entered his hands and they began to move; his hands helped his feet. . . . This all took much longer to execute than to decide upon. But the following morning found Darnu's gourd full of fresh water at Purana's lips, and a piece of juicy fruit fell finally into the open mouth of the good-natured sage.

Then Purana's jaws moved and he thought: "O benevolent Necessity. I see that you are now beginning to fulfill your promise." But when he realized that it was not the goddess but his companion Darnu who was stirring around him, he felt himself rather insulted and said:

"Eight mountain ranges and seven seas, the sun and the holy gods, you, I, the universe,—all are moved by Necessity. . . . Why did you awaken me, Darnu? I was on the threshold of blessed peace."

"You were like a corpse, friend Purana."

"He who like a blind man sees nought, like a deaf man hears nought, like a tree is insensible and immovable, has attained rest. . . . Give me some more water to drink, friend Darnu. . . ."

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'Drink, Purana. I still see a tear on your cheek. Did not the blessedness of peace press it from your eyes?'

The wise sages spent the next three weeks in accustoming their mouths to eating and drinking and their limbs to moving, and during these three weeks they slept in the temple and warmed each other with the heat of their bodies till their strength returned.

At the beginning of the fourth week, they stood at the threshold of the ruined temple. Below at their feet lay the green slopes of the mountain descending into the valley. . . . Far in the distance were the winding rivers, the white houses of the villages and cities where people lived their normal lives, busied with cares, passions, love, anger and hate, where joy was changed for sorrow, and sorrow was healed by new joy, and where amid the roaring torrent of life men raised their eyes to heaven, seeking a star to guide them. . . . The sages stood and looked at the picture of life spread out at the entrance to the old temple.

"Where shall we go, friend Darnu?" asked the blinded Purana. "Are there no directions on the walls of the temple?"

"Leave the temple and its deity in peace," answered Darnu. "If we go to the right, that will

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be in accordance with Necessity. If we go to the left, that too is in accordance with her. Don't you understand, friend Purana, that this deity acknowledges as its laws everything that our choice decides upon. Necessity is not the master but merely the soulless accountant of our movements. The accountant marks only what has been. What must be—will be only by our will. . . .”

“It means . . .”

“It means,—let us permit Necessity to worry over her calculations, as she will. Let us choose that path which leads us to the homes of our brothers.”

With cheerful steps both sages went down from the mountain heights into the valley, where human life flows on amid cares, love, and sorrow, where laughter echoes and tears flow. . . .

“And where our steward, O Kassapa, covers the back of the slave Jebaka with welts,” added wise Darnu with a smile of reproach.

This is the story which the cheerful sage Ulaya told to the young son of the Rajah Lichava, when he had fallen into the idleness of despair. . . . Darnu and Purana smiled, denying nothing and affirming nothing, and Kassapa heard the story. Buried in thought he went away toward the home of his father, the powerful Rajah Lichava.

ON THE VOLGA



ON THE VOLGA

I

AS HE went out on the deck of the steamer which was running upstream, Dmitry Parfentyevich drew a deep breath.

The day was ending and the sun was hanging low above the forest-covered mountain. The river furnished a majestic and peaceful picture. Somewhere in the distance a steamboat whistled; a sailboat heavily laden lay on the river and seemed as immobile as the sleepy wife of a merchant. The rafts all carried fires,—the men were cooking their dinners. Two small barks, fastened together and heading obliquely across stream, floated by, hardly touching the glassy surface of the river, and beneath them, swinging and swaying, hung their reflection in the blue depths. When the wake of the steamer, spreading ever wider and wider, touched this image, it suddenly broke and scattered. It was a sudden shattering of a mirror and the fragments floated and sparkled for a long time.

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"Are you all right, Grunya?" asked Dmitry Parfentyevich, sitting down beside his daughter.

"Yes," she answered briefly.

The girl wore a dark dress. A Scythian kerchief on her forehead threw a shadow over her pale young face; her large eyes were dreamy and thoughtful.

"The main thing is heavenly blessing and quiet," moralized Dmitry Parfentyevich.

His life was moving toward its close and he thought that nothing could be better than the quiet of a dying day. . . .

Only quiet and prayer after sinful vanity and weakness. . . . May God grant no new wishes, but save from every new temptation.

"Grunya?" Dmitry Parfentyevich looked at his daughter and he wished to ask about her own thoughts.

"Yes," answered the girl, but her gaze, dreamily running far ahead over the golden river and the mountains with their quiet veil of bluish mist, seemed to be seeking something else.

The passengers on the deck were just as quiet. Some were carrying on private conversations; others were getting ready for tea at the little tables.

In the stern sat a group of Tatars, returning

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home from Astrakhan. There was an old patriarch with three sons. A fourth, the favorite, had been buried in a strange city. Akhmetzyan had been taken ill with an unknown disease, lay a week and died.

"All is as Allah wills," said the stern face of the old man, but he had still to tell the mother of the death of her beloved son.

Everything breathed of silence and peace and the mountains on the right bank swam up one after the other and then, receding into the distance, they seemed to wrap themselves in a blue haze.

II

Near Dmitry Parfentyevich were the knots of passengers, some on benches by the table, others on the deck and sitting on bundles.

There were several raftsmen from Unzha, a fat and good-natured country woman, and an old man, probably also a small farmer. The centre of the group at this moment was a steward for the third class passengers. He was still young and was dressed in a worn and dirty frock coat, with the number "2" on the left side. A napkin hung over his shoulder and with this he attained remarkable success in rubbing the wet tables and the glasses.

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He had just brought to the deck a tray of dishes with his arms wide open and with his eyes looking ahead and at his feet at the same instant. He had put the tray on the table, wiped off the dust around it with his napkin, and then joining this group of his countrymen sat down on the end of the bench and at once assumed a leading rôle in the conversation which they had already commenced.

"I'll tell you," he said in a wholly confident tone, "if I cross myself with my fist, it works. This way: in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. It really works just the same. What do you think?"

He looked at the others with the air of a man who had just propounded a very clever riddle.

"The fist, you say?" asked one of the peasants from Unzha in surprise.

"Yes, the fist."

The listeners shook their heads as a mark of doubt and reproof. The farmer turned sternly to the young fellow:

"N-now, stop that! You claim to be above God. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you are a foo-fool to make the sign of the cross with your fist. Impossible. It never works."

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"It does!"

The young fellow looked round upon his auditors with a joyously radiant face and was about to give the answer to the riddle when he heard at one of the tables the impatient tapping of a spoon on a glass.

The fellow jumped up as if he had been shot. In an instant he was at the other end of the deck, grabbed the tea-pots, ran to the machinery and back, set the table, shook himself, ran below again, put up the orders and passed them around the tables, and all the while the conversation continued before an enchanted audience.

"He's beside himself!" said the farmer.

"Due to a stupid mind," added the old woman pityingly.

"The little fellow was a liar, that's all!"

"How can you do it with your fist? . . . That never works. . . ."

The general opinion was evidently very definite.

"Impossible," said several voices suddenly.

"It's impudence and nothing else. . . ."

"What——?"

"Where did you get that notion?"

"It's impudence. . . ."

"Just you listen," interrupted the young waiter,

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suddenly coming up the hatch, "and you may not think it impudent. . . . In the linen factory in the place where I lived there was a fellow and a machine caught all his fingers and slash bang! That's all! He didn't have a finger left! And his right hand too. . . . Just imagine: being a man with nothing but his palm left. . . ."

The audience was charmed.

"What are you driving at?"

"You see the question. . . . What would you do, brothers? . . . Could he cross himself with his left hand? . . ."

"What, what?" The farmer waved his hand. "You can't use the left hand. . . . That's for Satan. . . ."

"But he'd lost the fingers on the right, so he couldn't join them. . . . Had only the palm left! . . ."

"That's so. . . ."

The riddle became more popular. The passengers nearby listened; those further off got up and walked nearer to the speaker. Even the young merchant who was talking very authoritatively about politics at the tea table with a fat gentleman, deigned to turn his benevolent attention to the all-ingrossing riddle. He tapped with his spoon and beckoned to the waiter.

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"Waiter, how much? . . . O-oh! What did you say: with the fist?"

"Yes, your excellency, among ourselves. . . . It doesn't interest you. . . ."

"No, but it's really clever, isn't it?" remarked the merchant to his fat friend.

The latter's answer was unintelligible, for the man was struggling with a slice of bread and butter.

But the Tatars sat in the stern without taking any part in the general conversation. They were silent, but once in a while they made brief remarks to one another in their own language.

III

Dmitry Parfentyevich started like a war horse at the sound of a trumpet. Grunya did not take her eyes from the distant mountains and the river, but it was easy to see that she was not looking at them. Without turning her head she was listening intently to the conversation of her neighbors.

Dmitry Parfentyevich looked at her askance. Hitherto she would have turned to him immediately with a trusting question: "Papa, how's that?" Now she seemed to pay no attention to her father's opinion.

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He waited for her to ask but her large eyes fell with evident sympathy upon that knot of dark, ignorant people, who were shocked by such a meaningless change in their faith. . . .

He rose and walked up to the disputants. His thick-set, dry figure, savagely pure, in an old-fashioned costume, won for him the immediate attention of all.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"It's this way, you see, merchant. . . . This little fellow says you can cross yourself with your fist."

"I heard him but don't repeat it! That man's a fool!"

"Yes, yes," whispered one timidly, "we're all dark people. . . ."

"That's true, . . . you are. If you follow the teachings of your true masters, you'll find nothing surprising here."

The audience grew rapidly larger. All were now interested in the tall old man with quiet and majestically austere manners. Dmitry Parfentyevich was not embarrassed by the attention he was receiving. It was not the first time. There was only one person in that crowd that interested him and that was his scholar, his disobedient and devout Grunya. In his own way he loved his daughter and

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his rough heart was torn by her unwearied doubts and her sad look. He passionately wished her to feel that peace from heaven which his own heart had so fully obtained. But her disobedience always aroused in his stern soul a storm of suppressed rage and this struggled with his love and usually conquered it.

Grunya still kept her seat. She did not stir but she listened intently.

"Now listen," came to her ears the confident and harsh voice of her father. "This is the true cross and it is to this cross that we hold in order to be saved."

He raised his hand with two fingers raised, so that all could see.

"A dissenter," was the murmur in the crowd. Two or three merchants who were apparently fond of religious discussions, pressed nearer, when they heard this unexpected confession.

"We are not dissenters," continued Dmitry Parfentyevich. "We confess the true faith. This was the form of the cross which the holy fathers and the patriarchs believed in. This was taught by St. Theodore."

He raised his hand with the two fingers joined still higher.

"Press the thumb against the little finger and

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the ring finger. That is to signify the Holy Trinity. Three Persons united. Raise two fingers: that's for deity and humanity—two natures. Theodoret teaches again that the middle finger is to be bent a little. That symbolizes humanity reverencing deity. See!"

"Wait!" interrupted one of the merchants who had forced his way to the front. "St. Cyril says something else."

"St. Cyril says the same thing. Only he bids you keep both fingers straight."

"That must make a difference."

"Wait, my good man, that's wrong. . . . Don't interrupt. . . ." The speakers stopped. "Let him finish. . . . What about the fist, merchant?"

"Yes . . . that's the main thing."

"It's like this: if he lost his fingers he wasn't to blame. That means: God allowed it. It was His will! But a man can't live without making the sign of the cross. Without the sign of the cross he's worse than this heathen Tatar. He's bound to cross himself . . . with his right hand. . . ."

"Well?"

"And his fingers," concluded Dmitry Parfentyevich after a pause: "His fingers he must place in thought, as he is ordered by the holy fathers and patriarchs. . . ."

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The crowd heaved a sigh of relief and joy.

"Merchant, we thank you!"

"He decided. . . ."

"That's it: he just chewed it up and explained it."

"With thought! That's true!"

"Of course! . . . With thought, nothing else!"

"That will work all right. . . ."

Dmitry Parfentyevich looked at his daughter. . . . What did he care for this applause, these praises from strange, ignorant people! She, his daughter, kept looking straight ahead with a look of indifference upon her face, as if her father had said something which she had long known and which had lost all power to touch her confused and weary soul. . . .

The old man frowned and his voice became menacing.

"If he joins his imaginary thumb with the two imaginary fingers beside it—he is wrong. . . . A man who crosses himself that way will be condemned to eternal damnation. . . . Cursed be he in this life and he will have no lot in the next."

These violent and harsh words, suddenly falling upon the crowd which had just quieted down, changed its mood.

It became excited, began to murmur, separate

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into smaller groups. A black-eyed, black-haired merchant, who had maintained hitherto an obstinate silence, now struck his fist on the table and said with a flash of his deepset and enthusiastic eyes:

"True! The Devil Kuka and his whole crew are in that cursed cross with the thumb and the fingers next to it."

"No, stop!" shouted the Orthodox, "don't insult the true cross! Why do you separate the Three Persons, c-curses on you? . . . This is the Trinity in these three fingers. . . ."

"Where are your first fingers?"

"Merchant, have you read the hundred and fifth article?"

"Yes, it's on the end of the world."

Dmitry Parfentyevich remained the centre of the group. He was still composed and calm, but each time when he answered any of his opponents, he transfixed him with a stubborn and unfriendly glance.

With splashing wheels, the steamboat steadily ascended the river and cleft the blue surface of the stream; it carried with it this group of violently quarreling people and the clay slopes of the steep bank reëchoed their confused voices.

A steep mountain, which had concealed a bend

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in the river, now receded to the rear and a broad sweep of the river appeared in front. The sun hung like a red ball above the water and from the east, darkness spread over the meadows as if on the soft wingbeats of the evening shadows, overtaking the boat and falling more and more noticeably over the Volga.

IV

The silent group of Tatars suddenly rose from their places in the stern and with even step moved to the paddle box at the edge of the upper deck. They took off their coats and spread them on the deck. Then they took off their slippers and reverently stepped upon their coats. The glow of the sunset fell upon the rough faces of the Tatars. Their thickset figures were sharply outlined against the light and cooling heavens.

"They're praying," one man whispered and several left the quarreling group and walked to the railing.

Others followed. The argument quieted down.

The Tatars stood with their eyes closed, their brows were raised and their thoughts were apparently lifted up to that place where the last rays of daylight were fading on the heights. At times they

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unlocked their arms which were crossed on their breasts and placed them on their knees, and then they bowed their heads with their sheepskin caps, low, so low. They arose again and stretched their hands with the fingers extended toward the light.

The lips of the Moslems were whispering the words of an unknown and unintelligible prayer. . . .

"Look there," said one peasant, and he stopped hesitatingly, without expressing his thought.

"They are fulfilling the rites of their religion," asserted another.

"Yes, they're praying too. . . ."

The Tatars suddenly knelt, touched their foreheads to the deck, and at once rose again. The three young men took their coats and slippers and went back to their former seats on the stern. The old man was left alone. He sat with his feet crossed under him. His lips moved and over his beautiful face with its gray beard passed a strange and touching expression of deep sorrow softened by reverence before the will of the Most High. His hands quickly fingered his beads.

"See. . . . He has beads too."

"A zealous man. . . ."

"Yes, it's for his son. . . . He died in Astrakhan," explained the merchant who had gone down the river with the Tatars.

"Oh, oh, oh!" sighed one of them philosophically. "Every man wishes to be saved. No one wishes to perish, whoever he is, even if he's a Tatar. . . ."

It was too dark to tell who was speaking. The group melted together but the isolated figure of the old man still at his devotions could be seen at the edge of the paddle box above the water. He was silently swaying backwards and forwards.

"Papa!" suddenly came a soft voice.

It was Grunya calling her father.

"What is it, daughter?"

The girl was silent for a moment; she kept looking at that praying figure of the adherent of an alien faith, and then her young and eager voice clearly sounded through the quiet:

"Please, . . . what do you think: will God hear that prayer?"

Grunya spoke softly, but all heard her. It seemed as if a light breeze had passed along the deck and in more than one soul the question of the pale girl found response: will God hear that prayer?

All were silent. . . . Their eyes involuntarily turned upward, as if they wished to follow in the blue of the evening sky the invisible flight of that strange and unintelligible but beautiful prayer. . . .

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"Why won't He! . . ." came the irresolutely soft words of a good-natured peasant. "You see, he's not praying to any one else. There's only one God."

"Yes, the Father. You see, he's looking to heaven."

"Who knows, who knows! . . ."

"It's a hard question—the ways of the Lord. . . ."

A block creaked at the bow, the light of a golden star flew to the top of the mast; the waves splashed somewhere in the darkness; the distant whistle of an almost invisible steamboat re-echoed above the sleeping river. In the sky the bright stars appeared one after the other, and the blue night hung noiselessly above the meadows, the mountains and the ravines of the Volga.

The earth seemed to be sadly asking some question but the heavens remained silent with its quiet and its mystery. . . .

THE VILLAGE OF GOD

(A SKETCH FROM A TRAVELER'S NOTEBOOK)



THE VILLAGE OF GOD

(A SKETCH FROM A TRAVELER'S NOTEBOOK)

EARLY one summer morning I put my knapsack on my shoulders and set out from Arzamas.

Southeast of the city stretched the slopes of a green mountain. A little white church welcomingly and mildly peered out through the trees which grew in large numbers among the graves and beside the cemetery on the pitted sides of the mountain were some strange white spots. . . .

As I drew near I saw that these were small and almost toy houses of old brick with peaked roofs covered with mosses and lichens. Three were shorter than a man,—one, in the form of a chapel, was taller. The roofs supported eight-pointed crosses, and on the walls were the dark boards of ikons. The faces had been worn away by the winds and beaten by the rains.

I was told in Arzamas that these were all that

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was left of a unique village. In earlier times the entire mountainside had been covered with similar structures, as if a city of dwarfs had been laid out opposite to the real city with its gigantic churches and its monastery. The people called this place the "Village of God."

Every year, on the Thursday of the Seventh Week after Easter the local clergy come to this mountain and wave their censers in the air amid these peculiar houses; the incense perfumes the place and the choir sings:

"Remember, Lord, Thy slaughtered servants and those who died an unknown death, whose names, O Lord, Thou knowest. . . ."

For whom they pray, for whom they sing the requiem, whose sinful souls are remembered in this prayer,—neither the people of Arzamas who stand around and pray nor the clergy of Arzamas can tell definitely. . . . For them the service in the disappearing "village" is merely a pious and revered custom, a relic of the hoary past. . . .

And this past was sad and bloodstained. . . .

Arzamas was once on the frontier. The city guarded the border. The breeze which raised the dust on the distant steppes here roused great anxiety and alarm. Some looked toward the steppes with terror, others with uneasy hopes. . . .

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And every spark borne hither on the winds from the Don or the Volga, found here a goodly supply of inflammable material in oppression, violence, injustice, slavery, and grievous national suffering.

This was the soil where was planted the Village of God.

II

It began, according to tradition, in the days of Stepan Timofeyevich Razin. . . . The workmen of Stenka robbed even in Arzamas. They fled from here to the north of Nizhny Novgorod, nested for a while in the village of Bolshoye Murashkino, and then passed on to Lyskovo and Makary. At their heels came the generals of the tsar and the bloody vengeance of the followers of Razin was followed by the not less bloody vengeance of the tsar.

During Peter's reign in 1708, Kondrashka Bulavin sent from the free Don his "pleasant letters." "Young atamans, lovers of travel, free people of every class, thieves and robbers! He who wishes to go with the military campaigning ataman Kondraty Afanasyevich Bulavin, he who wishes to raid with him, to travel gloriously, drink and eat as he will, ride over the open fields on fine horses, let him come to the black mountains of

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Samara." . . . So wrote the rebellious ataman to the Cossacks of the Don, to the Ukraine, and the Zaporozhian Sych. Along the Volga, through cities north and south, to worthy commanders, flew the message and also to the villages and towns. In long and business-like letters, carefully composed with a view to their political effect, he set forth all the oppressions of nobles and magnates, all the wrongs and injustice under which the land had long been suffering. The appeals of Kondrashka inflamed the whole land, more blood was shed, and savage was the vengeance of the people. . . . Again from Moscow advanced the regiments of troops in accordance with the terrible order of Tsar Peter:

" . . . Go through the cities and villages which have joined the robbers, burn them to the last straw, slay the people and torture the leaders on wheel and stake. . . . For this plague cannot be removed, except by sternness. . . ."

In those days there was no lack of sternness and after the pacification even the cruel tsar wrote to Dolgoruky, not to execute the brother of the slain Bulavin, for many had joined the revolt from misapprehension or "from compulsion."

The rebels were carried to Arzamas. Scaffolds, stakes, and wheels were erected along the roads and the city during one of these periods of ven-

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geance was, in the words of an eye-witness quoted by Solovyev, "like hell"; for more than a week the groans of the victims of the terrible tortures filled the air and birds of prey hung over the places of execution.

After this pacification arose on the mountainside houses of the "Village of God," and the people began to sing the requiems on the hillside. . . .

Ere long the bone of the followers of Razin and of Bulavin were joined by the bones of the banished Stryeltsi (Guards). . . . Defiantly and in disobedience to the tsar's order, they left Vekikiya Luki, whither they had been sent, and they stoutly resisted the tsar's General, Shein, with a large force, but they were defeated in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter, as they were trying to cut their way through to Moscow to the Stryeltsi villages where their wives and children were living. The victorious general filled the prisons and dungeons of Arzamas with the men who had disobeyed the tsar's orders. The ring-leaders were punished. The tsar returning from abroad was dissatisfied with the weakness and the mildness shown by Shein to the rebels. A judge was sent from Moscow to make a new investigation. . . . There were not enough executioners in the city to administer the new tortures and punishments and more had to be

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summoned from Moscow for the occasion. . . .

New houses were added to the "Village of God." . . .

Drenched with blood, the naïve and rebellious dream of the people for a free life died away until new outbreaks commenced, a dream closely connected with the old cross and the beard, with Cossack bands, and with confused memories of the freedom of the steppes. The old injustice weighed more and more heavily upon them and hardened and increased their century-old suffering. The memory of the people involuntarily returned to those who promised freedom and who sealed this promise with their own and others' blood. . . . Time and time again, like stones washed down to the shore by the raging torrent, new groups of "houses of God" appeared on the slopes of the mountain of Arzamas.

At first, perhaps, each grave preserved the memory of a definite man, his name, and his saint on an ikon. Some one would bring these ikons and sprinkle the tombs of shame with passionate tears of love and sympathy. These mourners died. . . . The wind, the rains, and the sun faded the faces on the ikons, and along with these there perished the living personal memory of the people buried here. There remained hanging above the moun-

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tain only a vague tradition and a vague popular feeling, . . . a feeling of sad inability to comprehend, which dared not pronounce its own judgment and presented this to heaven. . . . And down the centuries, from year to year, even to our own times, sounds the solemn prayer for all those who had been put to death, be they innocent or guilty, and for all those who died an unknown death. . . .
. . . Whose names, O Lord, Thou knowest. . . .

III

I heard the following tale in Arzamas.

It was after the suppression of the rebellion of Razin. The tsar's generals had erected near Arzamas a whole forest of columns with cross-beams and towards evening the city saw in horror, as they looked from one hill to another, hanging upon them the bodies of atamans and of the men of Arzamas who had joined the revolt. The bloody sun set behind the mountain, fearful darkness covered the heavens, and crows swarmed in clouds around their booty. The people kept asking one another: "Who is hanging there on the mountain? Criminals and murderers or the defenders of popular freedom, the avengers of century-old injustices?"

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That same night a young merchant of Arzamas was driving his tired horse along the road from Saratov and he was urging it on with all his might. He abandoned far from the city his cart and the wares which he was bringing from the Volga, and was hurrying ahead without resting at all; he had learned from fugitives whom he had met that there was something wrong in the city and that the men of Razin were rioting in it. And he had left in the city his father and mother and his young wife with her first-born babe.

At midnight the young man galloped on his foaming horse out of the forest on to a hill in sight of his natal city. There was no gleam of fire to be seen above the city, no alarm bells to be heard. The city seemed dead; but in two or three of the churches were there timid lights,—perchance by the dead bodies of “honorable citizens,” who were waiting Christian burial. . . .

Suddenly . . . his horse started. . . . It was at that very place where now stand the “houses of God.” . . . The merchant saw a dread and leafless forest standing on the mountain side, and, like ripe fruit, the bodies of good young men hanging on the trees, with crows flapping their wings and picking out the eyes of the dead.

The young merchant’s heart had been surging

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with uncertainty and sorrow during his hurried journey by day and night, uninterrupted save by the need of changing his tired horses, and his soul was weighted down as by a rock with his hatred for the rebels of Razin. He stopped his horse under one scaffold, rose in his stirrups and with all his strength he lashed one of the dead bodies and cursed it. . . . The body swayed. . . . The chain creaked and a cloud of crows rose in the air, flapping and cawing.

A dreadful result followed: the tortured dead descended from every scaffold, from every wheel, and from every hook and rushed at the merchant. . . . The maddened horse tore through the fields, leaped the ravines, and reached the city utterly exhausted. And throughout the whole flight, like autumn leaves driven by a gale, dashed after him the shades of the executed, with their dead eyes aflame, and their fettered hands grasped after him with curses and moans, and their dead voices wailed, lamented, cursed. . . .

Then the merchant realized that it was not for him to judge those who were now standing before a far different tribunal, pleading there their own and others' sins, their own and others' wrongs, their own and others' blood. In that dreadful hour he took a solemn oath to bury all those who

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had been executed and yearly to have a requiem for them.

Since then, it is said that the houses of God have stood in Arzamas. Since then the clergy sing the requiem over the nameless graves and the ikons which have been brought hither do not perish unnoticed. . . .

IV

It was a clear, calm morning when I went out to the remains of the Village of God. A tired woman who was driving a lost cow crossed herself, when she saw the cross of the chapel. A gang of workmen, "panniers" of Arzamas, were going to their work. A very old peasant, gray as an owl and with faded but still living eyes, was sitting on the threshold of the chapel and binding the flaps of his rough boots. The sun had just risen above the distant forests.

"Greetings, grandsir," I said to the old man.

"Good morning, son. . . . Where're you going?"

"To Sarov."

"You're on the wrong road. There's the proper way. . . . To the bridge and then the village there."

"I know, grandsir. I left the road on purpose, so as to see the houses of God."

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"Look, son, look. . . . And pray here too. . . . It's a holy place, you know. . . ."

"Don't you know who's buried here?"

"Yes, son, yes! People of every class. . . . Violence! . . . A Saltykov, a landowner from the Vyvezdnaya Sloboda, who oppressed the people,—God forbid."

The old man sadly shook his gray beard.

"You know, old people say,—a merchant was going from Makary to Arzamas,—and offered thanksgiving for arriving safely. Glory to God—he was at home! At dawn he went out of the city peacefully and met the lord and his retainers on the bridge. There was no justice. . . . They hurled him from the bridge into the Tesha and in a day or two his body floated to the city. . . . It was picked up and buried here, on the mountain. And here it lies till the Day of Judgment. . . ."

I was already familiar with the name of this Saltykov: the old records in the archives of Nizhny Novgorod preserve the dark memories of the acts of this noble family, and one is well known from the revolt of Pugachev: his retainers collected the taxes by robbery. When the glad tidings spread among the people that Petr Fedorovich had made himself known and was marching to recover his throne, the serfs of Saltykov thought that there

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would be an end to their master's outrages and their necessarily sinful lives. The mir assembled, seized and bound their lord, put him in a cart and took him to the "tsar's camp" for trial. "But," said one landowner who described the incident, "the Lord heard the prayers of the innocent victim and the rascals instead of going to the camp of the pretender, carried him to the troops of Mikhelson."

It goes without saying that the kindly nobleman was quickly released and the wicked peasants received just punishment. Their bones perhaps joined those of the followers of Bulavin, the Stryeltsi and the victims of this same Saltykov. They all lie there together awaiting "the judgment of God" over all earthly actions. . . .

"Yes, there's the Sloboda," said the old man, rising to his feet and pointing to the village with its columns of smoke and with the morning fog across the river Tesha. "And there, higher up, were the gardens of Saltykov. . . ."

"Do you think these houses of God were built since, grandsir?" I asked.

"N-no, friend! Since! N-no. . . . Much earlier. . . . Perhaps since Pugachev."

"Who was Pugachev?"

"Who knows, we are dark people. We heard

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from our fathers and grandfathers nothing but Pugachev and Pugachev. . . . You know the old story. My father died forty years ago and he was ninety years old when he died. . . . And he was still a boy when Pugachev appeared. Count now, how long ago it was."

"A hundred and twenty years, grandsir."

"Yes, a hundred and twenty,—and more! . . . Pugachev was a stern man. Oh, so stern. You know, he didn't love the landowners. He'd go into a village. 'Give me your lords!' If the peasants hid them,—God forbid! Cruel. . . . My father, God bless him, once told me there were two villages side by side. The people of one guessed right. They took the ikon and went to meet him, ringing the bells. He pardoned them, rewarded them, gave them a charter of his favor. . . . Ours didn't; the fools didn't meet him and he burned the whole village."

The old man suddenly looked at me, saw my watchchain and the notebook in which I began to jot down the main points of his story,—and he suddenly took off his cap and said:

"Forgive me, for Christ's sake!"

"What's the matter, grandsir?"

"That wasn't so, perhaps. . . . We're dark people; how should we know? . . . Perhaps he

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never said it. . . . But it is true that he was stern. . . . He loved order. . . .”

The old man seemed to be afraid that the gentleman would condemn him for familiar stories about the high qualities of Pugachev, who “loved order” and issued “charters of his favor”. . . .

I succeeded in calming his anxiety, and we continued to talk. The old man proved communicative. His memory kept much curious lore and his simple answers revealed that same vague atmosphere which filled the place: a feeling of pardoning and timid lack of comprehension, of vague questioning and of prayer for those who lie here, under the earth, and perchance had been executed as punishment for crime or perchance had laid down their lives for a cause punishable here on earth but counted holy and righteous *there*.

The group of workmen stopped along with me to hear the almost forgotten traditions connected with this spot.

V

We went together into the little chapel. Its walls were covered with regiments of ikons, and at the eastern end was a crucifix also surrounded by ikons. Gloomy faces, dark boards, bereft of

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heads. . . . Oh, so many were lacking heads. . . . As if the vague feeling of the simple offerers had sought thus to express their feeling that the punishments were undeserved. . . .

I was especially surprised by one ikon, of a crucifix painted on the cubical base. It was not old or had perhaps been renewed and it might well have been a piece of individual workmanship inspired by the sadness of this place. On a semi-circular hill with no attempt at perspective could be seen a severed hand with compressed fingers. Beside it were huge nails. Hammer and saw were hanging in the air. Fragments of chains. . . . A column with a bundle of rods and whips fastened to it were painted against a background of whirling clouds. But a faint light pierced the clouds and penetrated the mists like a faint gleam of hope. And as if to emphasize this idea more clearly, the artist had depicted a cock greeting the sunrise. . . . On the top of the column the bird was standing with vibrating wings and open beak, welcoming the morning. . . .



Silently we left the chapel. Although the interior was not dark,—yet it seemed to me that in passing out through this low door we were passing from deep gloom into the light of a clear sky.